

WHAT NEW AND USEFUL UNDERSTANDING OF
INTERRELIGIOUS RELATIONS CAN BE OPENED UP BY
ENGAGING IN REGULAR SIKH WORSHIP WHILE
CONTINUING AS A PRACTISING CHRISTIAN?

by

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ABSTRACT

A professional doctoral study by an Anglican priest using qualitative research, this is an autoethnographic description of multiple religious participation based on fieldwork in a Sikh gurdwara and a Christian church, partnered reflection, interviews, focus groups, and a self-survey. The thesis contributes to practical theology by using continuous narrative to unite description, reflection and theory.

It shows the subtlety of religious belonging and identity for communities and the individual, examines how conflict of belief is addressed, and demonstrates difficulties with but overall growth in dual engagement. Focus groups show mixed views on multiple religious participation from clergy, but that Christian interreligious workers do find themselves participating in non-Christian worship despite being anxious about the response from other Christians. The thesis contributes to practice by encouraging them in reflective cross-boundary activity, calling on the church to support this and learn from their experiences.

A growing awareness of divine friendliness during meditation led to exploration of friendship in both religions, and contributes to theology of religions by introducing 'amicism', an approach that is discerning, open, peaceable, joyful, vulnerable, and attentive. The unique fieldwork of the thesis also contributes to the growing discussion in religious studies on the complexity of religious belonging.

DEDICATION

Dedicated to grandchildren Reuben, Arthur and Esme.

'... Is it not strange, that an infant should be heir of the whole World, and see those mysteries which the books of the learned never unfold?'

(Thomas Traherne, *Centuries of Meditations*, Chapter 3 section 2.)

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occasion. My spiritual adviser, took on the role of reflection partner, helpfully clarifying some issues and – equally helpfully – confusing others. Other names are given in the printed edition.

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ABBREVIATIONS

3 HO: Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere, also known as the Healthy, Happy, Holy Organisation.

5 Ks: five signs of an *Amritdhari*: *Kesh*, *Kara*, *Kanga*, *Kaccha* and *Kirpan* (see glossary).

BBC: British Broadcasting Corporation.

BME: Black and Minority Ethnic (BME United Co. is a Wolverhampton Social Enterprise)

DIFA: Diocesan Interfaith Adviser (see glossary).

DPT: Doctorate of Practical Theology.

FABC: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences.

GKN: Guru Ka Niwas Gurdwara, or Guest, Keen and Nettlefold.

ISRLC: International Society for Religion, Literature and Culture.

MRB: multiple religious belonging.

MRP: multiple religious participation.

NHS: National Health Service.

OED: Oxford English Dictionary.

PT: Practical Theology.

SGPC: *Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak* Committee (see glossary).

WCCM: World Community for Christian Meditation.

GLOSSARY

Words are English of Punjabi unless indicated otherwise.

Aarti: (Hindi) fire ritual where a plate with burning wicks is brought to each devotee.

Agapē: (Greek) love characterised by generosity, selflessness and generality of objects.

Agapētos: (Greek) beloved.

Akal Taht: 'Throne of the Timeless One' the highest of five courts, this one being set in the Golden Temple, offering rulings and judgements for the worldwide Sikh community.

Amritdhari: a Sikh who has received *amrit* and belongs to the *Khalsa*. He or she is expected to adopt the five k's, meditate regularly including before dawn, and be vegetarian and teetotal. Sometimes referred to as a 'baptised' Sikh.

Anand karaj: Sikh marriage ceremony.

Amicism: understanding a structure of relationships under the aspect of friendliness.

Amir or emir: commander, general or prince.

Ardas: prayer of supplication, part of daily prayer in the gurdwara.

Awagaun: cycle of birth and death associated with reincarnation.

Bhakti: (Sanskrit) intense emotional attachment between a devotee and their personal god

Bani: religious teachings of the Sikh Gurus.

Chaur sahib: ceremonial fly whisk.

Dalits: (Hindi) 'broken, scattered', those who have been subject to untouchability in the caste system.

Daswandh: tithing income for God's purposes.

Degh: cooking pot.

Dharma: path of righteousness.

Diocesan Interfaith Adviser: generic term in the Church of England for all who work at diocesan level on interreligious matters.

Durbar: the court of a ruler, here used for the worship room where *Guru Granth Sahib Ji* is displayed in the gurdwara.

Ek Niwas: 'one place of worship,' universalist temple in the West Midlands.

Epoché: (Greek) the bracketing of previously held beliefs to allow phenomena to speak for themselves.

Gobind Sarvar: Canada-based Sikh education programme with a gurdwara in the West Midlands

Gora/gori: white, used of Western Sikh converts.

Granthi: one trained in the reading of the Sikh scriptures and employed to lead worship in the gurdwara.

Guru Granth Sahib Ji: the Sikh scripture, the Eternal Guru.

Gurdwara: Sikh place for religious gathering.

Gurmukh: one who is God-oriented, and has overcome his or her ego.

Gurmukhi: language in which Sikh scriptures are written, used (along with Urdu script) to write Punjabi.

Harmandir Sahib: gurdwara at Amritsar, headquarters of Sikhi known as the 'Golden Temple.'

Hukam: divine will of God.

Hukamnama: word of scripture read after the *Ardas*, selected at random from *Guru Granth Sahib*.

Hwyl: (Welsh) stirring feeling of emotional motivation and energy.

Ikk Oan Kar: symbol at the beginning of Sikh scripture, signifying 'One Being Is.'

Izzat: (Hindi) honour, family or individual prestige.

Janam sakhi: collection of stories about the gurus.

Jap Ji: 38 stanza prayer at the beginning of *Guru Granth Sahib*, attributed to Guru Nanak.

Jathedar: cleric and judicial authority. There is one in each of the five tahts, the one at Akal That being the highest.

Jat: those in the traditional occupation (*zat*) of farmers.

Jenoi: (Hindi) sacred Hindu thread worn round the wrist.

Karah Parshad: warm, sweet dough made of wheat flour, sugar, and clarified butter. Distributed in the durbar as a sign of God's grace.

Kaccha, *Kachh* or *Kachera*: cotton underwear (one of the five signs of an *Amritdhari*).

Kafni: (Urdu) cloth belt.

Kanga: wooden comb (one of the five signs of an *Amritdhari*).

Kara: steel bracelet (one of the five signs of an *Amritdhari*).

Kesh: uncut hair (one of the five signs of an *Amritdhari*).

Khalistan: 'land of the pure,' objective of Sikh separatists, their own country in the Punjab region.

Khalsa: 'community of the pure ones,' initiated Sikhs, *Amritdhari*.

Khanda: 1. Sikh emblem in which two swords, *miri piri*, recognise the military (*amir*) and spiritual (*pir*) aspects, a central two-edged sword indicating the same balance of spirituality and practice, and the *chakra*, a circular throwing weapon suggesting eternity and wholeness (having replaced the *deg*).

2. two-edged sword found at the centre of the Sikh emblem.

Keshdhari: person with untrimmed hair.

Kirat karna: providing for one's family by working for a living.

Kirpan: steel sword (one of the five signs of an *Amritdhari*).

Kirtan: Sikh devotional singing, usually in the gurdwara.

Langar: communal meal which all share at the gurdwara.

Lohar: (Hindi) social grouping associated with blacksmiths.

Manmukh: self-oriented, an ignorant person bound by desires, ego and worldly concerns.

Maranatha: (Aramaic) come Lord, or our Lord has come (1 Corinthians 16: 22), used as a mantra by the World Community for Christian Meditation.

Mestizaje: (Spanish) 'miscegenation,' pointing to the strain of participating in two different (religious) realms.

Miri piri: two outer swords in the *khanda*, signifying the military (*amir*) and spiritual (*pir*) aspects of Sikhi.

Misl: originally sovereign states of the Sikh confederacy, now descendants of a military unit.

Mona: Sikh who cuts his or her hair (abusive term).

Mool Mantra or *Mul Mantra*: first verse of *Guru Granth Sahib Ji* encapsulating Sikh teaching.

Mukti: (Sanskrit) liberation of the soul from transmigration.

Naam Karan: Sikh ceremony for naming a child.

Near Neighbours: government-funded community cohesion programme for which the Church Urban Fund, founded by the Church of England, is the contractor.

Nirgun sargun: conundrum that God is both with and without attributes.

Nirvair: without enmity, a divine attribute.

Nishan sahib: symbol, referring to a yellow triangular flag incorporating the *khanda*, usually on a high flagpole outside a gurdwara.

Panj pyare: five beloved, first five initiates of the *Khalsa*, thence five initiates who administer *amrit* to others, and five initiates representing the originals in parades etc.

Parchar: Sikh evangelistic street mission.

Patit: lapsed *Khalsa* Sikh.

Philia: (Greek) affectionate love, as of a brother or friend.

Pir: (Persian) 'elder,' Muslim holy man.

Prasad: food-offering to God, consumed after worship.

Presence and Engagement: Church of England's programme for equipping Christians for multi-faith mission and ministry.

Programme: special worship and social event at a gurdwara.

Puja: (Hindi) Hindu prayer ritual.

Punjabi: cultural heritage and ethos of the people of the Punjab.

Qalaldar: (Urdu) Sufi mystic order.

Ramgarhia: *misl* named after Jassa Singh Ramgarhia, a carpenter put in charge of building a fort near Amritsar, who then became leader of the *misl* charged with protecting *Harmandir Sahib*.

Ravidassi: followers of Guru Ravidass, a contributor to Guru Granth Sahib and an untouchable. Relations with mainstream Sikhs are problematic.

Rahab: (Urdu) lute-like musical instrument.

Rehat Maryana: *Khalsa* guide for the Sikh way of life covering religious rites and ethical observances.

Saccidananda: (Sanskrit) being, consciousness, bliss, a three-fold characterization of Brahman, the Absolute.

Sach khand: bedroom where *Guru Granth Sahib Ji* is put to rest at night.

Sahajdhari: non-*Khalsa* Sikhs, sometimes referred to insensitively as a 'slow adopters.'

Salaat: (Arabic) Muslim devotional liturgy oriented toward Mecca.

Salwar Kameez: (Arabic/Persian) trouser suit worn in Pakistan and India by women and men.

Sangat: Sikh congregation.

Sant Nirankari: worshippers of the Formless One with their own living guru and a problematic relationship with Sikhi.

Sanyasi: (Sanskrit) Hindu religious mendicant.

Satguru: True Guru, in Sikhi usually referring to God.

Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee: manages gurdwaras in Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and Chandigarh, and administers Harmandir Sahib.

Shahada: (Arabic) Muslim testament of faith.

Shukriya: thank you.

Sikhi: Sikhism, but underscoring the multiple ways of being Sikh.

Simran: meditation on *Waheguru*.

Singh Sabha: nineteenth century Sikh revivalist movement.

Sukhmani Sahib: 'pearl of peace', hymn of blessing by Guru Arjan.

Tabla: pair of small drums.

Takhat: throne or seat of power, in which Guru Granth Sahib is presented.

Takht: judgement seat in one of the five leading gurdwaras.

Tankah: breach of Khala discipline calling for community service not reinitiation.

Tarkhan: social grouping associated with carpentry.

Überseern: (German) to see through.

Vaisakhi: celebration of anniversary of founding of the *Khalsa*, April 13 or 14.

Waand chhakna or *vand ke chakna*: sharing of one's earnings.

Waheguru: Wonderful One, a term used by Sikhs for the absolute.

Waheguru ji ka Kalsa, Waheguru ji ki fate: 'the *Khalsa* belongs to God, victory is the gift of God,' Sikh greeting and response.

Yagnopavitam: (Hindi) Hindu thread ceremony marking initiation.

Zat: (Hindi) group with a traditional occupation.

1. PRELUDE

A) Fieldwork

'I think it would be better to try somewhere else.' S had confirmed where our awkward conversation was going. I would not be doing any research here. I had been attending the gurdwara for six weeks, been greeted warmly, and started making field notes in the expectation my research would be approved. A meeting with the General Secretary had been encouraging. I had given him my research summary and a letter seeking agreement and all seemed well, except, with hindsight, for three shadows: the gurdwara committee was divided between the old guard and a younger generation; I had not approached the gurdwara education officer, S; and my offer to attend the committee had been rejected as unnecessary. I met with S and apologised for not contacting him but he seemed unconcerned, anxious only that the approval was formally recorded for the benefit of the new committee next May. The next weekend I saw S. again: 'There are a few questions the committee is asking.' We would meet to discuss those questions that Thursday, something which felt oddly formal.

We started by chatting about each other's children, and the conversation meandered on until I realised I would need to raise the issue of the committee's questions myself. S suggested we go upstairs. It was quiet and dingy. S seemed nervous. He was holding the documents I had provided, covered with written comments. The questions started.

'How you will manage without knowing Punjabi?' We talked about translations on screens at the gurdwara, and using my own books. I would be happy to attend language classes, but classes they once ran there had stopped. The discussion of language petered out...

‘We have some clever people on the committee, doctors, lawyers, and so on, and they wonder how you are qualified to do research into *Sikhi*.¹ Is this a PhD?’ I replied that it was a specialist professional degree, researching the experience of deepening engagement across religions rather than into *Sikhi* as such. I mentioned my academic qualifications. He said ‘we realise Christian ministers are all very learned.’ It didn’t sound sarcastic but had some tone behind it that I could not identify, perhaps embarrassment at my defensiveness.

‘The letter you brought, asking for approval, who wrote it?’ I had drafted it but it was authorised by the university as part of the ethics process. I paused, unclear as to what the issue was.

‘When your research is finished, what happens?’ It would be presented for examination. Committee members would be welcome to comment on a draft beforehand, but it must be my own work based on my experience. S said ‘I thought that would be so.’

‘We can’t commit the gurdwara to such a project before the election of the new committee in May next year.’ I was most welcome to keep attending and asking questions, but I should not begin formal research. I explained that leaving it seven months did not fit the university timetable.

‘I think it would be better to try somewhere else.’ The bluntness of this verdict was a shock, but there was no mistake. ‘Perhaps you could pursue it with another faith or with Sikhs in another town, but not here.’ Conversation continued in a pleasant if sad tone, with repeated assurances that I would be welcome to

¹ Use of the word *Sikhi* ‘reflects a relatively fresh, post-colonial way of underscoring this diversity [‘the multiple ways of being Sikh’] which purposefully defies the epistemological binders of Eurocentric categories and their weighty corollaries, in this case Orientalist constructs such as the aforementioned Sikhism’ (Singh P. and Fenech 2014, 6).

spend time there, but my mind, with the ruthless panic of the researcher, was elsewhere. We parted at 8-45 p.m., after a conversation of over three hours.

B) Personal reflections

This was a painful experience, a personal, academic and professional rejection. Perhaps medics and lawyers did not grasp the nature of reflective practice; was I a victim of discipline discrimination? Then I felt sheepish that I had not foreseen this, and that I still did not fully understand what was going on. Why did the change of committee loom so large? Now I felt like an innocent – but clueless – bystander rather than misunderstood. The invitation to carry on attending seemed genuine and the question about what would happen with my findings had been presented casually, but was this, after all, important?

Or was there a deeper, more instinctive element? Was I no longer fitting into the familiar role of 'guest'? Was it less my ignorance than my attempt to gain in knowledge and experience that was unsettling, and, if so, what did that say about boundary issues? Some young people of Punjabi origin struggle to understand the language, and even those who could speak Punjabi, including S himself, found a translation of the Sikh scriptures helpful, so was the language barrier less a practical difficulty than a social boundary? Could my quest be unsettling their own sense of identity?

Then there was *my* identity as a white Christian Englishman. Was lack of Punjabi seen as a lack of respect for the culture I was seeking to investigate? Gurmukhi, the Punjabi script, is a holy language developed by Guru Angad for the very purpose of writing scripture. Perhaps I was seen as guilty of deep-rooted imperialist insensitivity. And perhaps I was so guilty.

C) Theological reflections

As someone secure in my current social, religious and family situations, rejection was unfamiliar. I felt disappointed, resentful and ashamed, with little of the humility Christian faith – or even a general spiritual maturity – should bring.

As to linguistic division, the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9) showed the breakdown of a universal language as the response of a jealous God to humankind's overreaching ourselves.² My research could be regarded as an attempt at self-transcendence, trying to see the world from another world-view than my own, impious arrogance perhaps sensed by whoever had turned me down.

D) Why start here?

This prelude accords with the genre of memoir in starting with the project being imperilled -

Thrusting the reader [...] into a situation of danger or threat before gradually revealing the circumstances leading up to the event and providing the experience with some sort of context. (Thomas 2016, 51)

The incident occurred close to the beginning of research so writing about it here accords with the chronological sequence, and it problematizes the subsequent description of method which may otherwise suggest that I controlled the process. It introduces the authorial character, located in my white-Britishness; it demonstrates personal, cultural and theological reflections that can flow from one event, and it alerts the reader to the narrative approach taken to writing the thesis.

² But see Gaston's interpretation of the Babel myth as one of liberation from the oppressive imposition of uniformity, celebrating diversity (Gaston 2017, 127-131).

E) Findings at this stage

i) Mutuality

Seeking agreement for research was not a formality but required a confluence of agendas and sympathies with the hosts.

ii) Factions

The gurdwara, like many worshipping communities, was not a coherent whole. Different forces were at play.

iii) Lack of awareness.

Large gaps in my understanding were being exposed despite my being an experienced interfaith officer who had known the gurdwara for some time. This was a new way of learning.

iv) Intersecting identities

Being Christian was not my only significant identity. I was made aware of my white-Britishness, cultural difference from the community, and my role as researcher. Each of these affected my experience and my writing.

2. STRUCTURE OF THESIS

A) An overview of the thesis

This is a Practical Theology³ (PT) doctoral thesis (50,000 words) based on three years of part time work. It is shorter than a PhD because three previous years of work have already generated a literature review, a published article, a reflective piece and a proposal for research, 34,000 words total (Barnett 2015). The DPT⁴ is a professional doctorate which seeks not only to apply knowledge to practice but also to generate knowledge from within the practice milieu, the intention here (Smith 2009, 6).

The thesis advanced is that engaging reflectively in multiple religious participation (MRP) can significantly enhance interreligious understanding; and the aim was to participate in two religions over a sustained period, reflecting and recording as I went, and describing how my own and others' understanding changed in the process. The thesis illuminates the experience of MRP, raises questions about religious belonging, challenges the practice of interfaith workers, and develops understanding of divine friendliness and its consequences. It is presented in narrative form, a genre being explored in PT, and which, for the reasons given below, is particularly appropriate for this research.

The research arose from my desire to extend interreligious work into a deeper form of engagement, a crossing of boundaries, to do so reflectively, and to report on the experience carefully, in the confidence that this related to wider cultural changes, and the hope that it would prove a positive experience and one

³ Defined as 'a place where religious belief, tradition and practice meets [*sic*] contemporary experiences, questions and actions and conducts a dialogue that is mutually enriching, intellectually critical, and practically transforming.' (Pattison and Woodward 2000, 7).

⁴ Doctorate of Practical Theology.

significant for other diocesan interfaith advisers⁵ (DIFAs). Many people participate in more than one religion but the initiation of this as a method of engagement – in all its personal and communal complexity - has not been described as it happened before, despite its potential significance for interreligious relations. The thesis offers an overarching narrative that includes description of background, research methods, actions, incidents, observations, reflection, and theological interpretation.

The current chapter will explain the narrative approach taken and consequent variation from the standard layout of a PhD. Chapter 3 introduces MRP and its significance, and explains my interest. Chapter 4 describes my methodology, autoethnography, why it was chosen, how it has been used, and why I engaged with *Sikhi*. Chapters 5 and 6 draw on fieldwork and reflective pieces to consider the process of settling in to MRP and then the challenges faced. Chapter 7 takes this initial experience back into a wider discussion of Sikh and Christian identity. Chapter 8 describes ways in which my engagement with *Sikhi* developed over time, and Chapter 9 deals with the issue of how to describe myself, before Chapter 10 describes the ending of fieldwork and employment. The falsity of the sense of completion is reflected in a sequel describing continuing engagement, Chapter 11. This is then brought back to the familiar genre of a doctorate, though still within a narrative context, with Chapters 12 and 13, discussion and (provisional) conclusion, which engage my experience and reflection in a sustained way with professional and theological contexts. This

⁵ The generic term in the Church of England for people appointed by the church to assist in creating positive interreligious relations and offering advice on those relations within the church, although many of us had different job titles, as I did. Although it is this group I have in mind the research is intended to be of use to all interfaith workers, professional or voluntary.

sequencing is designed to best reflect the time-flow of the whole experience, engagement and reflection together (a time-flow which can be seen in graphic form at Appendix 1).

B) Explanation and justification of use of narrative

The preliminary draft of the thesis was a piece of free writing in which I recounted the story of the research. That was then corrected and extended by a careful review of all the research material from fieldwork and reading. It has been restructured several times, and has been subject to my own continuing reflection and the comments of others, but the original narrative is still visible, providing a different template from that of a traditional PhD. As a piece of PT 'the process and journey of ... research is as important as any final results, findings or insights,' and narrative brings this journey to the fore (Bennett *et al* 2018, 31). As a description of reflective practice this 'is based on narratives of experience as a way of discovering [...] values- and theories-in-use' (Bolton 2014, 67). 'Theological reflection is central to, perhaps even the defining element of, [PT]', and has been traced back to scripture itself, spiritual self-examination, subjectivist romanticism, the critical voice of liberation theology, and the self-construction of post-modernity, as well as the professional aspect of ministerial development (Thompson with Pattison and Thompson 2008, 18; Walton 2014, xiii-xx; Thompson with Pattison and Thompson 2008, 22-25). The attempt to integrate personal story and academic analysis by sustained narrative is in accord with a quest within the discipline of PT, the difficulty of which is shown in *Christian Practical Wisdom*, where the challenge is acknowledged but the two forms of writing are still kept separate (Bass *et al.* 2016, 16).

Such writing has not always found an easy place within the wider academy but is a key to professional development, and is my writing strategy for embracing the reflection and reflexivity that 'are an influential part of the professional doctorate process' (Lea 2012; Bolton 2014, 2; Smith 2009, 42). The traditional PhD structure of sequential presentations of critical review of the area, method, evidence, analysis, discussion and conclusion, while kept in mind, has been adjusted to more faithfully represent the constant interplay between action, observation, reflection and theory (Witcher 2006, 3). An example of difference is the reduced initial literature review, restricted to a description of MRP and its cultural and theological background in Chapter 3. Material drawn from literature is instead distributed throughout the piece to indicate the reading pattern associated with the reflective process, so a consideration of the literature of Sikh and Christian identity is placed in Chapter 7, marking my decision to delay that investigation to prevent it overtaking my initial experience of Sikh engagement, and material on friendship is considered in Chapter 12 as my reflection led gradually to the development of amicisism⁶ as an interpretive scheme. I wrote a more extended literature review on the relationship between PT and MRP earlier in the course.⁷

As the review of literature is accorded a temporal flow, so too are the findings. Those at the end of each fieldwork chapter are related to that phase but not rendered redundant by findings at subsequent stages, any more than the formal 'conclusions' can be allowed to foreclose on an on-going process of engagement. Accordingly I have not given conclusions in the introduction to

⁶ Amicisism: understanding a structure of relationships under the aspect of friendliness.

⁷ Unit 09 20966 'Practical Theology: Context, Practice and Performance', 14,000 words. *Multiple Religious Participation: A Subject for the Practical Theologian?*

respect that temporal flow. The narrative structure is foundational, but the style is adjusted. A thesis – particularly in short form - requires terseness in comparison with normal story-telling, with only the occasional passage of thick description to take the reader directly into the world of study (Creswell 2013, 218-219).⁸

The prelude and this comment on reflection and narrative are presented at the beginning to frame the whole thesis and to recognise a relationship not only with what is given, my experience and the academic and religious traditions, but also with the reader (Ganzevoort 2012, 216). The reader is encouraged to see the whole thesis as narrative, a report on research at the desk as much as in the field, because ‘empirical or positive facts only reach us at all through being already embedded in story’ (Allison 2003, vii). ‘Narrative’ is a broad category which can include traditional research reports, as it can laundry lists and the arrangement of objects on a mantel-shelf, but ‘the life experiences that infuse the data constitute the primary topic, the true “narrative”’; and here the topic is my life-experience as both multiple religious participant and researcher (Squire, Andrews and Tanboukou 2013, 5, their quotation marks). Tense has been used with care, sometimes awkwardly, in discussing literature to help indicate and form the place of its reading in the flow of that life-experience.

As well as the background in PT and professional reflection there are some specific reasons for prioritising narrative in this case. This is a piece of autoethnography, which uses the ‘*first-person*’ voice or point of view, positioning

⁸References are also tersely presented. For brevity only surnames are used of writers and practitioners, though more details are available in the bibliography and of course no disrespect is intended. Those with the surname ‘Singh’ are further identified by initials to reduce confusion.

the researcher as the narrator of the story' (Adams, Jones and Ellis 2015, 78, their italics). It has the format of a memoir, 'a first-person account of one experience, aspect, place or period in someone's life' with the author deciding when to begin and end the story (Cline and Gillies 2012, 184-185). The theological theme to which my research led, friendship, would be distorted by a traditional academic approach; describing Aelred's view of friendship in that mode would be 'trying to turn the orange into an apple' (Lefler 2014, 5-6). The narrative turn in theology recognised the healing potential of truth-telling in this way rather than by propositions, with the reader entering into the story and so being changed by it, and it is my desire to change and challenge but also to heal (Walton 2014, 164). Narrative is also closely related to the issue of Christian identity, personal and communal, under discussion here, and it allows for the expression of emotional reaction, crossing boundaries and non-rational experiences, important data for this research (Stroup 1984, 17; Orsi 2005, 200-201; Shaw 2011, 33-34).

C) Problems with narrative

i) Reader beware

Voice has frequently been privileged because it has been assumed that voice can speak the truth of consciousness and experience [...and that] voice lingers close to the true and the real [...] qualitative researchers have been trained to privilege this voice. (Jackson and Mazzei 2008, 158-159)

These assumptions are now widely challenged, but attempts to respond by such forms as polyvocal layering only disguise the controlling hand of the editing researcher, in my case not only as it affects presentation of other voices but also in reports of my earlier self, where there is sometimes three years between the writing and the conclusion of editing (Jackson and Mazzei 2008, 165-167, 175-

177). Suspicion should not lead to paralysis, especially in the case of transgressive voices which might not otherwise be heard, as here (Jackson and Mazzei 2008, 207-208, 233-234). Even so readers need to question what they read and how they are reading it, and to deconstruct why one story is told and not another. (Jackson and Mazzei 2008, 241, 243). The reader here may be assisted in this discernment as I locate myself in terms of motive, religion, ethnicity and race, nationality, gender, sexuality, age, profession and class.

ii) Plot and its limits

Story is seductive, and there is a plot here which arose as I experienced (or formed) a dramatic shape to the unfolding of events (Cresswell 2013, 272; Thomas 2016, 23-30). The plot is emphasised by the structuralist prioritisation of action over characterisation, most characters apart from the narrator being underdeveloped to preserve people's confidentiality (Thomas 2016, 24). The plot summary is –

- peril (Chapter 1);
- background (Chapters 3 and 4);
- peril overcome (Chapter 5);
- the new normality (MRP) established (Chapter 5);
- challenges to the new normality, and crisis (Chapter 6);
- the new normality confirmed and developed (Chapter 8);
- finale signifying and celebrating the new normality (Chapter 10).

Presenting a coherent story involved craft, and selection from the field notes, interviews and other material, craft and selection that is inevitably partial. Nonetheless the piece acknowledges the post-structuralist challenge that plot is an arbitrary authorial imposition on untidy reality. Different tempi and

perspectives are introduced as the narrative digests academic content, and the piece relates two different timescales, of action and of reflection, dancing around each other rather than walking in step. Aspects are deliberately left hanging in the air or allowed to remain in their confusion,⁹ the sequel (Chapter 11) undermines the conclusive nature of Chapter 10, and the actual conclusion (Chapter 12) is itself deliberately subverted. The positive plot-line is also put in tension by the bathos of the author's mistakes, recording of which also addresses the ethical requirement of truth-telling and yields primary phenomenological data, my sense-making process (Adams, Jones and Ellis 2015, 24-29).

These are indications of the 'gaps and fissures in human experience' which theologians are too ready to disguise with coherent stories and bogus happy endings (Walton 2014, 168). This had its hazards; cohesion in the face of fragmentation can rest on the writer's own sense of identity but my identity was itself under investigation, for which a strong plot-line may have been my counterbalance (Walton 2014, 167). Narrative is never a neutral record but creates - and destroys - plot and characters, including the authorial character.

⁹ For example the missed chance to go on a home visit with *Guru Granth Sahib Ji* (p. 62-63), the cry of 'bloody politics' (p. 100), or the opacity of the financial arrangements for my *Sukhmani Sahib* (p. 151).

3. NEED FOR RESEARCH

What new and useful understanding of interreligious relations can be opened up by engaging in regular Sikh worship while continuing as a practising Christian?

This was the question my visits to the gurdwara were attempting to answer, and which I believed had a wider significance than my personal quest.

A) Multiple religious participation (MRP)

i) MRP and associated issues

This research is an example of MRP: participation in the same religious activity with those of other religions, or in one religion while belonging to another; or a pattern of participating in more than one religion (Wolfteich 2012, 328). Other terms used are: 'multiple religious belonging' (MRB) and 'dual belonging' which point to commitment but perhaps without activity; 'multiple religious practice', which includes purely private devotion and belief; 'back-and-forth riteing,' community engagement in rites of more than one religion; 'hybrid religion',¹⁰ which rejoices in the flexibility of identity on which it is based but has unfortunate connotations for some hearers; 'syncretism', which carries a pejorative sense;¹¹ 'interstitial theology', which 'aims at the construction of liminal, hybrid perspectives' for religious discussion; '*mestizaje*,' pointing to the strain of participating in two different realms; and 'creolization,' speaking of the engagement of the dispossessed in a communal activity as contrasted with the individualism of economic and social liberty (Phan 2004; Cornille 2010; Laksana 2015; Ruparell 2013, 121; Voss Roberts 2010, 51-52; Gravend-Tirole 2011, 419-

¹⁰Regarded as offensive by at one practitioner I interviewed, for whom 'hybrid' in this context is akin to the term 'half-breed' in relation to race. The term is indeed found in use in the history of British racism (Eddo-Lodge 2018, 19-20).

¹¹ Despite attempted rehabilitation (Schmidt-Leukel 2009, 67-89; Ruparell 2013, 121).

420; McGuire 2008, 193). 'Hyphenated Christianity' pointed to a possible conclusion rather than being an appropriate term for the research process itself (Goosen 2011). While recognising the overlap between these concepts MRP is preferred here, as the emphasis on participation in two communities is central and the nature of belonging is an issue under investigation rather than part of the method.

ii) A taxonomy of MRP

There is a multiplicity of different reasons for and ways of engaging in MRP, and some attempt has been made to distinguish between them and even to rank them (Gravend-Tirol 2011, 421; Coles 2013, 31; Herk 2015, 43; Cornille 2010, 4). I offer a fuller categorisation primarily to locate my own activity.

a) Cultural setting

In some cultures religion is not primarily a matter of belonging but use: 'Shinto for the living, Buddhism for the dead' (Bragt 2010, 10). Through Western eyes there is MRP taking place but this is not how those taking part see it, though Cornille adds the qualification - important in my case and that of my fellow DIFAs - that 'most religious traditions expect a total and unique commitment [...] from their specialists or spiritual elite' (Cornille 2010, 3).

b) Family structure

My interviewees included two couples from mixed Sikh/Christian backgrounds who maintained some level of joint practice without difficulty.¹² Miller describes some difficulties from a Jewish/Christian context but is positive about it, and

¹²This is not of course a universal rule, especially about community reception. In the one case the cross-religious aspect had slowed the courtship but once marriage was agreed relationships had been harmonious.

children of dual-religion families found that to be a positive background (Miller 2013; Arweck and Nesbit 2010).

When people ask them what religion they are, they name two. And then whoever is asking them looks completely baffled, or possibly offended, and says, 'But how can you be both at once?' They say, 'I just am.' (Fridkis 2010)

Dual faith families have an integrity of their own not appreciated by mono-cultural observers (Kato 2016, 176).

c) Enculturation

There are heroes of Christian interreligious activity who sought to enculturate Christianity either by entering a culture new to them such as Donovan, Monchanin, Abhishiktananda, and Griffiths; or by continuing with their own non-Christian culture, such as Rodrigo and Pieris, and, among my interviewees, Bhogal (Donovan 2001; Oldmeadow 2008; Swindells 1997; Harris 2010). As culture usually has religious entanglements so enculturation is likely to be interreligious (Geffré 2010, 96). Hope for a new synthesis produces tension: 'The best thing is, I think, to hold, even if in extreme tension, these two forms of a unique faith, till dawn may rise' (Phan 2003, 511 note 48, quoting Abhishiktananda). However Christian enculturation may mean a distancing from the host community to establish something new, where hosts become guests and forfeit control, as in Christian ashrams, resented by some Hindus who felt the leaders were subverting Hinduism in the interests of Christianity (Oldmeadow 2008, 225; Coles 2013, 204-207).

d) Borrowing

Christians sometimes engage with other faiths to enhance their own understanding and practice of Christianity. In the West many draw on

Buddhism, something which may not involve engagement with living Buddhist communities, but be an 'intensely personal and individual practice' (Knitter 2013, 143). 'Passing over,' rooted in a shared silence and imagination, entering another religious experience while remaining loyal to one's own, has the intention of coming back to the first faith with one's own standpoint relativized, and so to awaken a sense of mystery (Knitter 1985, 205-216). The approach of the borrower is essentially asymmetrical, with the religion visited in a secondary role (Cornille 2010, 5; Phan 2003, 514; Gonzalez-McKernie 2015, Premawardhana 2011, 79-80). Such borrowing raises issues of misappropriation, power and permission, as in the enthusiasm for American first nation spirituality among other ethnicities; as well as opening to the possibility of a conversion not originally intended (Thatamanil 2016, 16-17; Cornille 2010, 4).¹³

e) Transcendentalism

Christian identity may be lost not by conversion but dissolution. Lassalle sought to use Zen to cut through the imagery with which Christians had cluttered the word 'God,' but found that Christian identity ceased to concern him: experience was primary, theology secondary; a direction that can also be traced in Merton (Jeanrond 2010, 115). Hart's non-realism followed a similar path –

There is no truth, and instead a plurality of truths, [...] this pilgrimage is never complete, but merely passes out into scattering and endlessness. (Hart 2006, 133)

He declared himself Hindu and Christian¹⁴ more as a challenge to the significance of such labels than a claim of dual belonging (Hart 2006).

¹³ Other transitions may be more complex as with Panikkar: 'I "left" as a Christian, "found myself" a Hindu, and I "return" as a Buddhist, without having ceased to be a Christian.' (Phan 2003, 506, quoting Panikkar).

¹⁴ And, according to Wikipedia, Muslim (Wikipedia 2018).

f) New Age

New Ageism tends to receive short shrift among theological commentators (Cornille 2010, 3-4; Geffré 2010, 94-95). Students of lived religion offer a more sympathetic view of it as generating a creative, playful bricolage which challenges the authority of religious institutions and of systematisers including some theologians (McGuire 2008, 185, quoting Orsi).

g) Joint participation from outside.

Viewing all religions from outside, but wishing to participate in religious community life and choosing to join more than one religious community (Cobb 2010, 22).¹⁵

h) Expressing solidarity

Religious sharing to express solidarity where one party is in a difficult position, seen in Gaston's engagement with his local mosque (Moyaert 2015, 5; Gaston, 2009).

i) Development of friendship

Friendship may be seen as a consequence or an enabler of MRP, a means and goal that cannot be separated because in pilgrimage 'traversing the mountain [... is] integral to the religious quest' (Thatamanil 2016, 24-25). There is a parallel between inter-riting and love in its complexity, intimacy, mutual reception, longing for the other-than-contingent, and bodily and symbolic nature, working alongside emotions and ideas (Geldhof 2015, 222-223).

¹⁵ This presumably related to people Cobb actually knew. It is a category that would otherwise seem hard to imagine.

j) Strategy of resistance

As when Dalits took the caste-freedom of Christianity back into their Hindu culture to the frustration of Hindu and Christian establishments alike (Samuel 2015).

iii) *Placing my own research*

My research started as something close to 'borrowing,' pursuing engagement with *Sikhi* while remaining Christian in the hope that this would increase my awareness of and responsiveness to God. However I approached *Sikhi* and Christianity as two whole, specific systems without seeking an amalgam, and the research was community-based, unlike the private borrowing described above. As it progressed 'development of friendship' became an appropriate description, although I had disparaged that aspect of interreligious relations initially.

B) Reasons for my interest

i) *Personal background*

'All writing is 'positioned' and within a stance,' and this can be expected to shape the findings, interpretations and conclusions (Creswell 2013, 214, 216).

My background has its place in the ongoing movements of migration that brought first Christianity and then *Sikhi* to these shores. My mother's family talked of Huguenot antecedents; my father's carried vague suggestions of Judaism. Both families were embedded in the masonic and Free Church life of Birmingham, but my father became an Anglican churchwarden, and I was baptised and confirmed Anglican. I had three distinct Christian 'awakenings' at school: a Scripture Union visitor came every week to lead a scrummage of bored, mischievous and rather cruel little boys to the Lord, and I was struck by his respect and kindness towards us; there were weekly parades to Matins in the

parish church, where I had a sense of presence, something I didn't think anyone else - clergy, choir, teachers - had noticed; and when I was fifteen we were given *Honest to God* (Robinson, 1963) to study, demolishing any tendency to regard Christianity as childish. Those strands have stayed with me: a connecting of true Christianity with respect and kindness, a sense of the numinous, intellectual curiosity, and an ambivalent attraction to and criticism of ritual.

After ordination aged 25, life carried on pell-mell until I came to my 50's and a late midlife crisis which took the traditional clerical form of a loss of faith. It was specific to doctrinal matters; I retained a personal loyalty to Jesus alongside a continuing affection for the community of the church and even the institution in its current weakened form, but had lost confidence in doctrinal formulations, seeing them as attempts by authorities, secular and ecclesiastical, to harness the power of religious experience for their own political ends.

It was against this unsettled background that I was running on the treadmill in March 2007 at a municipal gym in Smethwick -

I started to pay attention to the pattern the sunlight was making from behind me, a silhouette of silver light round a black human shape. It seemed to be not just my silhouette, but a sign of the glory of all humankind. Then that was overlaid with the presence of Jesus, there with me. His glory was visible, now as golden light, still radiating out of the human shadow in which it was hidden. He invited me to continue exploring the wounds in his hands, which I realised I had been doing for many months. I felt an overwhelming awe at the humility and generosity of Jesus in patiently allowing this. A feedback developed, in which the more I was aware of his humility the more I was aware of his glory which in turn made me more aware of his humility and so on until I felt I would burst. I now know that no description of Him can be glorious enough. I found myself repeating silently over and over 'alleluia, alleluia!' in an attempt to let off steam.¹⁶

¹⁶ Text of a note written on the day, edited.

I was intensely happy throughout the day, telling my wife that something had happened, then describing it the next day. I had the conviction that belonging to the Church is a gift to be received in thankfulness, not the temptation to spiritual compromise I feared. I realised Christ 'does not need or seek to diminish the glory of others. In his light the glory of Muhammad or the Buddha shines more clearly than ever.'¹⁷ I tried to find a man I had argued with about car parking to apologise.

'Similar to states of feeling, mystical states seem to those who experience them to be also states of knowledge,' a certainty I shared (Maxwell and Tschudin 1996, 24). As to how I recognised Jesus 'the possibility [...of] self-disclosure should not be excluded' (Weibe 1997, 110). Factors in discernment along with certainty are: a) immediate practical outcomes; b) healing; c) change of relationships; d) comfort; and e) good feelings; of which I experienced all except healing. (Maxwell and Tschudin 1996, 37). For the Catholic Church encouragement of established doctrines is a key test, against which my experience was ambivalent (Weibe 1997, 28).

The vision felt permissive and I was keen to see how this would unfold.

ii) Professional background.

In my parish ministry I had become involved in interreligious engagement, so when the Bishop of Wolverhampton told me of his intention to appoint an interfaith¹⁸ officer, half time, with the other half in a parish, I applied for the post, being appointed in October 2009.

¹⁷ Text of a note written on the day.

¹⁸ 'Interfaith' is the term used by the Church of England. I use it here in the narrower context of professional discussion, but generally prefer the term 'interreligious,' as emphasising a communal and cultural aspect.

Every diocese in the Church of England has such a post, but the way in which post-holders operate varies. I prioritised networking so that I could connect Christians and members of other faiths who wanted to improve relationships, and was in a position to draw people together when events required. This formation of friendships was enjoyable, but required little spiritual engagement, “saris, samosas and steel drums” for the already well-intentioned.’ (Casey 2016, 149, her quotation marks). Acknowledging that all my relationships began from a Christian schema I wanted a deepening to the point that ‘the other’ could have an effect, could move my boundaries (Cheetham 2002, 11).

I now had a ‘push’ to something new in the form of this dissatisfaction to match the ‘pull’ arising from the Christic invitation of the vision.

iii) Engagement with MRP

When considering a subject for research as an interfaith officer there were a number of opportunities. I could have done some work on the effectiveness of *Near Neighbours*;¹⁹ if well done it could be sure of attention; or have explored the role of DIFAs in association with our national structure *Presence and Engagement*.²⁰ However I was drawn towards incidents of spiritual significance where the boundaries of religion became porous.

In 2013, for example, a local imam asked my advice about a young man in his congregation who had dreamed he had met the prophet Isa (who Muslims identify with Jesus) and that Isa had delivered a blessing for the whole community. When I went to a nearby church the vicar told me in turn of a vision

¹⁹ *Near Neighbours*: government-funded community cohesion programme for which the Church Urban Fund, founded by the Church of England, is the contractor.

²⁰ *Presence and Engagement*: the Church of England’s programme for equipping Christians for interfaith mission and ministry.

someone there had recently had of the waters of God's love flowing out into the community. Although the young man was acting as a faithful Muslim he and his imam were graciously engaged with something that might reasonably be considered Christian witness, especially if the vision in the nearby church was seen as confirmation. In subsequent discussions I found Christians and Muslims were divided between themselves, some supportive, others dismissive, and was drawn into a wider consideration of dream interpretation (Barnett 2015). I remember the awe that our (Muslim and Christian) God was at work. This had arisen spontaneously, but it led me to wonder whether someone could put herself in the way of such cross-religious experience.

Sundermeier described four levels of engagement with other religious traditions. The first was that of avoidance of threat; the second, that of participatory observation, was the characteristic position of DIFAs; but I was looking to the third, 'compassionate experience,' exposing myself to the fascination of another faith tradition; and allowing the possibility of the fourth and final stage, where the temptation of the other challenged my own religious self-understanding and became a call in its own right (Gaston 2017, 42-43). Accepting this vulnerability to the appeal of other faiths is in accord with the kenotic heart of Christianity, a function of self-emptying love, which may be why I had a sense of peace as I took this objectively radical step (Gaston 2017, 43). From the start, however, this was not just a piece of personal and professional development but related to a wider religious and cultural agenda.

C) Cultural and Christian context

i) Culture conducive to mixed belief

The idea that there are a limited number of coherent historic religions has come under sustained criticism, partly on ideological grounds, with a conviction that we are entering the 'Interspiritual Age' or that religious change is one part of a world-wide cultural shift towards greater harmony of which present fundamentalisms and nationalisms are passing symptoms of resistance (Teasdale 1999, 4-7; Kenney 2010).²¹ A sociological viewpoint suggests Britain's current situation is that of superdiversity, a condition observable world-wide and distinguished by a dynamic interplay of community variables requiring intercultural interaction (Vertovec 2007, 1034-1035, 1045). The hybrid city, a 'third space' where neither the general nor the specific holds sway, is recognised, and the 'mongrel' city celebrated (Sandercock 2003, xiii; Baker 2009, 18, 32-33).

This complexity has been paralleled in the study of lived religions:

...religion [...] is made up of diverse, complex and ever changing mixtures of beliefs and practices, as well as relationships, experiences and commitments [where] individuals' lived religions are not fixed, unitary, or even particularly coherent. (McGuire 2008, 185)

Interest in the area is rising: the European Association for the Study of Religions had *Multiple Religious Identities* as the theme of its 2018 annual conference; and my own papers at the ISRLC²² annual conference in 2016 and at the Professional Doctorate Summer School in 2017 both aroused a gratifying level of interest. Schilbrack has called on philosophers to attend to lived religion and religious

²¹ For a contrary more pessimistic view, despite a straw-clutching last page, see Marshall (2018).

²² International Society for Religion, Literature and Culture conference: *Lines in Sand: Borders, Conflicts and Transitions*.

diversity; and Appiah's 2016 BBC²³ Reith Lectures on the fluidity of personal identity specified the religious aspect (Schilbrack 2014; Appiah 2016).

ii) Differing Christian reactions to interreligious complexity

Christian reactions to this vary, exemplified by the much discussed typology of attitudes as exclusivist, inclusivist and pluralist, but there are others (Hedges 2008). Particularism has a significant following, seeing different religions as discreet language games with different core experiences and ideas of salvation, and "acceptance" recognises different religious views exist without seeing them as in competition with Christianity (Hedges 2008, 115, 24). Relationalism prioritises personal and community relations, including shared history, so that inter-personal (and I would add inter-communal) relationships are not the out-workings of prior theological positions or under their judgement but the primary source from which theorising has to flow (Dupuis 2010, 62).

A notable attempt to deepen interreligious relations is scriptural reasoning, where people with a good understanding of their own scriptures act as mutual guides in small interreligious groups, seeking new insights together. This approach can be extended from scripture, taking wider religious life as the 'text' for consideration (Ford 2006; Clooney 2010, 67).

iii) Growing Christian acknowledgement of MRP

Interreligious prayer was, according to a declaration from a joint consultation of the World Council of Churches and the Vatican an 'urgent call for a growing number of Christians today, and ... a matter of concern for all Christians' (Ryan 2008, 1). The Catholic Church has identified dialogues of life, action, theological

²³ British Broadcasting Corporation.

exchange, and religious experience (Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales 2010, 50-51). This last was a call to -

share [...] spiritual riches, e.g. regarding prayer and contemplation, faith, and ways of searching for God or the Absolute [...] '*not so much an idea to be studied as a way of living in a positive relation with others...*' (Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales 2010, 51, their italics marking a quotation from John Paul II)

This is described as new to the church and recommended only for confident, well-grounded Christians (Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales 2010, 51).²⁴ A World Council of Churches consultation launched in 2014, *Exploring Hybridity, Embracing Hospitality: Towards a Theology of Multiple Belonging*, led to the publication of a dedicated journal and then a book, twenty-eight articles in all (Rajkumar 2015; Jesudason, Rajkumar, and Dayam 2016). It called for a hospitable attitude towards what some saw as an inevitable cultural change: 'religions are not fortresses to be defended but well-springs of flourishing life!' (Jesudason, Rajkumar, and Dayam 2016, 2-4; Thompson 2016).

A 1992 Church of England report addressed Christian participation in other-faith worship. Understanding another faith involves appreciating its worship, but engagement could seem a pretence or a betrayal of one's own faith (Church of England Inter-Faith Consultative Group 1992, 32). Christian participation might mean one thing to Muslims and Jews to whom the visitor would be from another faith, and another to Hindus and Sikhs who might see it as confirmation of universalist views (Church of England Inter-Faith Consultative Group 1992, 32). Ministers should remember the representative nature of their office (Church of

²⁴ But 'The Roman Catholic discourse remains quite polarized: either one dialogues with other traditions or one verges toward syncretism [with no positive implications] the second it transforms one's Christian behavior on a religious level' (Gravend-Tirole 2011, 417).

England Inter-Faith Consultative Group 1992, 36-37). Subsequent guidance referred to interiority, calling for it to be –

made clear that there is a difference between, on the one hand, being present and attentive while prayer is offered from any religion, and on the other hand, participating in or assenting to that prayer. (Presence and Engagement no date a, 2)

How to make this distinction and to what end is unclear. A 2017 report noted blurred religious identity -

One participant commented that their experience of ministry in multifaith contexts was of ‘meeting people on a spectrum of identity, which might include clear commitment to just one faith community at either end, but a whole variety of different mixed commitments in between. (Presence and Engagement 2017, 3)

This was evident in three brief case-histories, leading to the comment -

While for some this fluidity is theologically problematic, nevertheless participants recognised the importance of acknowledging people’s self-understanding – even where this challenges straightforward categorisation. (Presence and Engagement 2017, 3-4)

There are several guides for Christians engaging with neighbours of other faiths. Hooker and Lamb called for vulnerability in ministry, and a re-evaluation of many areas of ministry and the faith itself (Hooker and Lamb 1986, 53, 68). Wingate discussed inter-faith prayer, concluding that to meet at a heart level required shared praying and worshipping despite risks (Wingate 2005, 111). For Chapman visiting a mosque should lead to learning and friendship only, not joining in worship (Chapman 2007, 23-25). Sudworth linked faithfulness to Christ and the multi-faith context by an eschatological acceptance of post-Christendom marginalisation, believing that as faith boundaries are re-drawn the Christian God will act anew (Sudworth 2007, 143-152). Gaston’s religious and political engagement with Muslim neighbours marks a standing alongside the vulnerable,

recalling this aspect of PT (Gaston 2009; Liamputtong 2007). He participated in the Ramadan fast, sharing in Islamic public worship but focussing on Jesus, submitting to Allah through Christ (Gaston 2009, 92).

If Sudworth's eschatological approach with its theological vulnerability is placed alongside the practical vulnerability of Gaston it gives context and substance to the vulnerability in ministry for which Hooker and Lamb call.

iv) MRP: an ecclesiological challenge

Worship is where a community derives its distinctive identity and large issues are at stake (Ryan 2008, 21). Religious identity is always provisional, 'an elusive [...] manifestation of a reality which transcends every human attempt to pinpoint it,' and that leads to an unease which generates both problem and opportunity for interreligious relations, entailing vulnerability but also a receptivity that arises from the hope of new understanding of the mysterious God and self alike (Panikkar 2010, 136; Moyaert 2011, 281-282). The blurring of that identity indicates to some that 'as a human family we are on the threshold of a new corporate consciousness of being a global community,' while others dismiss it as a 'genial pan-religious melange' (Ryan 2008, 4; Barnes 2012, 264). Religious belonging cannot be based on the individual's feelings alone, the communities involved must have a say (Kireopolis 2015, 20).

Some claim that all religious identity is inescapably mixed, but those cultures which experience MRP as a normal aspect can be a challenge to Western Christian thought (Knitter 2013, 214-215). This tension is evident in the history of relations between the (Catholic) Federation of the Asian Bishops'

Conferences [FABC] and the Vatican.²⁵ The FABC took interreligious dialogue as one of three priorities, along with enculturation and the transformation of political, social and economic life, seeking to show where God is present and active rather than engage in metaphysical argument (Phan 2004, 120-121). It called for a dialogue of sharing of religious practices, understanding this dialogue as essential for the enculturation of Christianity, its rescue from a colonial past, and the kingdom orientation to which the Church is subservient: 'the Spirit's presence and activity affect not only [...] individuals, but also society and history, peoples, cultures *and religions*' (Fox 2002, 44; Phan 2004, 126, 237-240, quoting John Paul II, my italics).

Phan offered 'inclusive pluralism' as the underlying theology of MRB, in which, while Jesus should be seen as the one mediator, other saviour-figures may be thought of as participating mediators, so that MRB is not only possible but also desirable as the Spirit opens the way to all truth (Phan 2003, 499-504; Phan 2004, 60-76). This view was censured by the Vatican as inadequately representing church teaching on: the unicity and universality of Jesus as Saviour; the role of non-Christian religions; and the unicity and universality of the Church as the sacrament of salvation (Phan 2017, 15, 18-19). Phan responded to these by pointing to the work of the Spirit as a universal 'other hand' alongside Jesus; by saying that understanding of other religions must arise from engagement with them in self-emptying mode; and by reiterating that the Church must be at the service of the kingdom rather than an end in itself (Phan 2017, 86, 115, 131). The church authorities have gone silent with regard to Phan, but the dialogue

²⁵ But 'the forcefulness of the many pastoral documents [of the FABC] has abated somewhat in recent years with the appointments of more conservative and precisely chosen Roman-leaning bishops throughout Asia' (Fox 2012).

demonstrates that what is at stake is not just the church's theology of religions but its whole self-understanding and identity (Phan 2017, 8-9). This sensitivity is shown up most sharply within Catholic structures but affects Christianity's understanding of itself more widely.

It was not only from the traditional direction that Phan could have been criticised; the faith-specifics of his framework were challenged by more fluid models, where the issues he addressed melted away. If the symbiotic relation of religions is accepted there is no need for them to be brought into dialogue, they are already multiple in their identities, and orthodoxy is a red herring which should be replaced with an orthopraxy of liberation (Premawardhana 2011, 76-77, 83, drawing on Pieris). A 'global [PT]' would arise from interreligious shared responses to the injustices of the world and ecological devastation, responses contemplative and prophetic, enlightening individuals and transforming society, and muting declarations of such beliefs as the finality of Jesus (Knitter 1985, 229-230). Christianity could be characterised as an experience rather than a belief, an experience needing to be re-actualised in each culture with no 'essence of Christianity' to be protected (Geffré 2010, 96). There was also criticism that Phan was over-influenced by the monastic and priestly – male - models of engagement of theological elites, downplaying the communal and the hybrid which better represent the complexity that arises for women and men in everyday life (Voss Roberts 2010, 46-52).

Some theologians prefer to try to understand and evaluate MRP through concrete experience rather than abstractions, an understanding best developed in friendship and expressed through 'hermeneutical hospitality,' a welcoming of

other viewpoints (Phan 2003, 507, 518; Moyaert 2011, 313-314). This includes the 'intrareligious dialogue' (Panikkar 1978) -

a personal, interior experience of the encounter of two or more religious traditions, [...] allowing them to interact, while remaining open to the unexpected and unforeseeable personal transformation such an encounter may produce. (Phan 2003, 511)

This research is an insight into such personal experience, and it touches on these wider issues of religious identity.

D) A problem with the question

Some of these more fluid models suggest 'religion' as a category of human experience is itself amorphous and suspect: 'the search for an essence [of religion] ends up in vagueness' (Smart 1992, 11). The contested claim has been made that in many communities there is no division between self and the natural world let alone between the religious and the secular; while others characterise religion in a way too extensive to be useful²⁶ as 'etiquette,' the rules whereby communities relate (Morris 1987, 185; Harvey 2013, 199; Cox 2010, 8).

The mediaeval European division between religious and secular which fed into the religious/non-religious dichotomy in modernism was exported willy-nilly to the rest of the world (Harvey 2013, 65). It interweaves with issues of resources and power, an aspect of orientalism identified as having the strategy of giving Westerners the upper hand (McGuire 2008, 21-22; Vásquez 2013, 26). Orientalism is embedded in Western culture and is hard to guard against; I follow one suggested line of resistance: 'concentrate on the slow working together of cultures that overlap, borrow from each other and live together,' while 'fostering

²⁶ As with a number of functional definitions of religion.

[an] empathetic technique... for understanding [...] the concrete experiences of other communities' (Said 2003, xxii; Cox 2016, xiii).

Not only is religion as a category culturally and politically fraught but so is its application. The idea of individual religions can be seen as colonialist, in that from an Asian point of view 'singular religious identity is the aberration' (Thatamanil 2016, 9). 'Christianity' too is only recognised in a domesticated form, positive and reasonable, having glossed over the anarchic, irrational aspects that give religion its social life (Vásquez 2013, 29, 31). Religious respectability has been closely policed, the holding of sacred texts being an early point of reference, and *Sikhi* being rejected as a 'syncretistic combination of Hinduism and Islam' (Daggers 2013, 26). This policing still goes on: in 2012 the Druid Network was refused membership of the Interfaith Network of the United Kingdom because its presence might cause offence to established members (Gledhill 2012).²⁷

This research into belonging to two religions at once both depends on and problematizes the notion of separate religions, and in its exploration of *Sikhi* recognises the fluidity between what the West identifies as 'religion' and other identity-forming factors such as nationality and ethnicity.²⁸

²⁷ The decision was later reversed following a change of membership criteria.

²⁸ Grunk has commended the usage 'transreligious' rather than interreligious to avoid the suggestion that there is space between separate religious worlds (Leirvik 2014, 18).

4. METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

Before entering the necessary complexity of this chapter it should be noted that at the heart of the research there was a simple idea involving a time of worshipping with communities of two different religions and reflecting on the experience without specific expectations except for any researcher's general hope that it would be worthwhile. It is distinct from –

that ethnography which records experience in religious communities and may reflect deeply on other aspects but avoids authorial religious reflection;

that theology and spiritual writing which reflects deeply on other faiths but does not engage with flesh-and-blood non-Christian communities.

As this is a reflective piece the artifice involved is described, but the two approaches with which I am comparing it also involve artifice in the dismemberment of experience, reflection and theory, something which goes less remarked because those constructions fit familiar academic genres. It is appropriate that the move toward integration attempted here should occur under the aegis of PT with its holistic aims.

A) PT and interreligious engagement.

As in-service training I took an MA in interreligious relations when I started the interfaith role, which led to interviewing people about the link between their interreligious engagement and meditative practices (Barnett 2012). This more practical approach to theology, relational and interested in the activities of religion rather than more abstract frameworks, appealed.²⁹

When I started the DPT in 2012 it was still a moot point as to whether PT could relate to interreligious and non-Christian religious exploration or whether

²⁹ I had previously (1998) done an MA in Philosophical Theology.

it was inherently Christian, and relevant issues of method had not been addressed (Greider 2012, 455, 458). In 2010 it was said that other religions could only be approached on Christian terms, and a major survey of the discipline in 2012 overlooked the PT of non-Christian religions beyond describing it as an area where there is 'room for growth' (Pattison and Woodward 2000, 6; Miller-McLemore 2012, 14-15).

Some writers were addressing this area, however, with a few calling specifically for the study of MRP. Forward argued that pastoral theology (and thus PT) must relate to diverse beliefs all marked by complexity, referring to: cross-cultural family relations; Westerners taking up Eastern religions; and the Chinese fusion of religions (Forward 2000, 249, 252-253, 254). Greider attended to intrareligious and intrapersonal religious 'plurality', investigation of the interreligious scene, and 'pluralism,' building good relationships across religious difference, challenging PT to work for the latter (Greider 2012, 454-455). Moore urged on PT 'meeting religiously' to identify life-giving aspects of different faiths (Moore 2009, 18-19, 31-45). She called for the study of lived religious life in its complexity and vitality, and recommended co-participation in religious practices (Moore 2009, 27, 15-16). The intrapersonal aspect was exemplified by Thompson's dramatization of a dialogue between his earlier more conservative Christian self and his later identity as a Buddhist Christian (Thompson 2011).

Interreligious matters are now sitting more easily within the discipline, exemplified by Gaston (2017) and the work of two Muslim practical theologians, Isandarova and Rajput (Graham 2017, 178). PT is nonetheless accused of white European-American bias (Beaudoin and Turpin 2014, 267-

268). My sharing in this distortion is inevitable, but presenting reactions as personal rather than claiming a spurious objectivity means that they are usefully – and perilously - exposed to the reader. I have taken note of the Christian roots of PT as well as reflecting my own by assuming in the reader a general knowledge of Christianity but not of *Sikhi* where I have introduced even common terms.

I had an issue, MRP, I wanted to explore, reason to think it would be of interest to a wider audience, and a discipline, PT, in which to address it.

B) Choice and justification of methodology

The methodology used for this research is autoethnography. Attention to wider methodological aspects explain and frame this choice.

i) Qualitative

Engagement with qualitative method is essential to the professional doctorate (Smith 2009, 62). It calls for judgement, insight and wisdom, allows broader, speculative, risky non-standard work, and connects with world-views and the intrinsically valuable and interesting (Pattison 2007, 272-281). It uses a local, concrete, embodied starting point from which to ask radical questions of monolithic and totalizing traditions (Brown 2014, 124-125).

ii) Phenomenological

Reflective practice is rooted in phenomenology, focussed on lived experience and personal consciousness, combined with critical theory (Eby 2000). Description needs protection from premature meaning-making by the bracketing associated with the phenomenological *epoché*, something appropriate not just for formal research but in attending to any unfamiliar religious context (Pratt 2015, 65).

According to Cox, the phenomenological researcher should attempt to bracket her own religious views: 'the phenomenology of religion belongs squarely within the social sciences and is entirely distinct from theology' (Cox 2010, 148). However the possibility of the theologian taking a phenomenological approach can be argued, using Cox himself as a guide. He acknowledged that the way he was using 'phenomenology of religion,' in its rejection of religious – or materialistic - interpretation by the observer, was only tenuously linked to Husserl's understanding of phenomenology itself (Cox 2010, 25, 35). Husserl's attention was not so much on this high level of interpretation but on revealing the meaning-making activity at its earliest stages. For him observers never passively received perceptions, but were actively and unavoidably integrating them by intuition into their subjectivity by selecting the structures of those perceptions that gave images or meaning. Husserl sought to get behind this process of reification and the resulting image or meaning by 'bracketing' it (the *epoché*), so that the original perception and the eidetic intuition that gave the image and meaning could be examined separately (Cox 2010, 28-29). I was trying to get nearer to Husserl's approach by paying close attention to my original perceptions. I acknowledge that those perceptions were being formed by theology as an aspect of my intuition, along with other emotional, cultural and personal responses, but by allowing confusions and errors to stand I was acknowledging where my intuition had failed, showing that perception and intuition were indeed separate processes. Any guiding theological schemes as to interreligious relations were held back to a later stage when they could be critiqued in the light of those first perceptions. I intended to be guided in this research, in my emerging theology

and religious identity, as much as possible by my sensations, the great bulk of which inevitably gave rise to intuitions and a few of which did not.

iii) Reflective

This research engages perception and ethnographic interpretation, but then moves toward the philosophical activity associated with anthropology, an experimental way of prising an opening and following where it leads, within a methodology of hope (Ingold 2013, 49). To maintain the self-investigative aspect I used the term autoethnography but sought to move in this more reflective direction.

iv) Theological

Anthropology may be philosophical, but it is also secular.³⁰ This project is theological, and it is contextual, related to my social settings. Contextual theology recognises that theology is shaped by culture, contemporary thought forms and human experience, alongside scripture and tradition, but this research varies from the norm in that: the context, MRP, has been deliberately created; it is a dual context, Sikh and Christian; and the reflection is not from an exclusively Christian viewpoint (Bevans 2002, 3-4).

Of the seven models of contextual theology outlined by Bevans the nearest to this research is the transcendental, starting from one's own experience (Bevans 2002, 103-116). This is defended from the charge of irrelevant particularity because the subject is a product of an environment and so is articulating the experience of a cultural group, or even of humanity as a whole if that expression can achieve 'authenticity' by following the precepts: 'be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible' (Lonergan 1972, 53). The

³⁰ Although the question has been raised as to the extent to which the discipline is itself inadvertently culturally Christian; and the category of 'the secular' can be regarded as semantically parasitic on that of religion (Cannell 2005; Cotter and Robertson 2016, 3).

transcendental model has been criticised as claiming a universalism for the views of a Western, male sub-culture, and (along with autoethnography) as self-absorbed therapy (Bevans 2002, 104-108). Cross-cultural encounters may mitigate that, but there is a contrasting risk of losing touch with one's own background (Bevans 2002, 18-21). The overall hope is that engagement with the ideas of another culture, inevitably filtered through one's own context, broadens horizons and reduces cultural solipsism.

v) Professional

The research had a professional as well as a theological context, but the hoped-for outcome was new understanding with practical consequences rather than new practice per se, distancing it from the pragmatism associated with some action learning. It adopted a 'worm's eye view,' allowing the more ironic, balanced approach from which phronesis can develop (Pattison 1997, 154-155). Action learning should not just ask what is to be done, but also 'what do I stand for?' (Pedler and Burgoyne 2008, 320). This research came from a desire to develop harmony between people of different religions, believing that establishing religious mutuality is an important part of that. It sought a deepened, more comprehensive and more intimate relation of a Christian with *Sikhi*, developing understanding and skills useful in other relationships across religions.

Action learning may include an element of appreciative enquiry, and this writing is intended to encourage gurdwara and church, my partners in research (Zandee and Cooperrider 2008). Bolton wrote of reflective writing involving sharing with peers and developing in response (Bolton 2014, 136-147). This indicates the communal nature of the work, something which may approach the ideal of peer-enquiry commended in action learning (Pedlar and Burgoyne 2008).

New material and reflection is also sought in 'confusion, ambiguity and risk,' facing the fear of appearing incompetent and exposing uncertainties and vulnerabilities (Pedler and Burgoyne 2008, 324; Scaife 2010, 22).

vi) Summary

In summary this autoethnographic research was to be qualitative, phenomenological, reflective, theological and professional.

C) Methodology

Methodology is a -

'contextual framework' for research, a coherent and logical scheme based on views, beliefs and values, that guides the choices researchers make.'
(Kara 2015, 4, quoting Grierson and Brierley)

i) Autoethnography

Autoethnography is more than a method (Jones, Adams and Ellis 2015, 17).

Four interrelated historical trends contributed to the formation of autoethnography: (1) *a recognition of the limits of scientific knowledge and a growing appreciation of qualitative research*; (2) *a heightened concern about the ethics and politics of research*; (3) *a greater recognition of and appreciation for narrative, the literary and aesthetic, emotions and the body*; and (4) *the increased importance of social identity and identity politics*. (Jones, Adams and Ellis 2015, 25-26, their italics)

It explores 'the interplay of introspective, personally engaged selves and cultural beliefs, practices, systems, and experiences' (Adams, Jones and Ellis 2015, 17).

Among its features the following relate to this research: observing as an ethnographer and describing as a story-teller; and working the territory between the orienting and disorienting story (Adams, Jones and Ellis 2015, 85). The particular experience of the observer strains against dominant social descriptions, critiques those descriptions, embraces vulnerability with purpose, and seeks to understand and change society (Denzin 2014, 19-20.).

Strangely little about religion is to be found in introductions to autoethnography, though there is a fictionalised account of a student's engagement with a congregation of Messianic Jews, and a convert from Catholicism to Judaism reflected on attending Mass again (Ellis 2004, 237-240; Boylorne and Orbe 2014). This lack of attention is not entirely reciprocated by the study of lived religion. 'There's not much auto-ethnography around in academic writing' where there is a tendency to 'bracket our assumptions', but Brown (2001), Lofland (1977), and Festinger, Riechen and Schachter (1988) are influential autobiographical writers in the religious field, and a number of writers have begun articles by explaining their personal interest in a subject (Chryssides 2018). Theology needs an inductive approach to MRP, attending to the lived experience of practitioners, and autoethnography offers that. Through its connection with the reflective writing associated with professional development this is a developing aspect of PT (Dupuis 2010, 62; Walton 2014, 3-42; Graham 2017, 175).

Some self-reflection is an unavoidable element of modern ethnography, though this is a matter of degree and perspective which may change during the process of the fieldwork (Coffey 1999, 123). I used myself as the focus of research because of the access required to understand the effect on practitioners of MRP as deeply as possible, and because a 'disorienting perspective necessarily entails risk, vulnerability, vertigo; it invites anger and creates distress,' a problem in asking others to engage (Orsi 2005, 204). This despite possible benefits: 'it is questionable whether a person can really understand their own religion if their own religion is the only religion that they know' (Beaudoin 2014, 199). It was unusual autoethnographic research in that the setting was

contrived, at least in part, and it challenged my identity rather than engaging a pre-established identity or life experience.

ii) Drawbacks to autoethnography

Autoethnography is vulnerable to the charge of having fictitious elements, or of being too personal to provide public truth. Some autoethnographers do use fiction to convey a greater truth but I have not taken this path (Ellis 2004, 125). Members of the gurdwara and church involved and partners in reflection have read what I have written and I include any comments which show their recollections differ from mine. As with any research the reader is invited to consider her own experience or related research to assess the likelihood of this account, construing it for theological as well as historical truthfulness (Stroup 1984, 237).

Another problem with autoethnography is that it invites an emotional response from the reader that cannot necessarily be foreseen and may affect the interpretation and understanding of the research (Méndez 2013, 284). My method included a check on this.

D) Method

i) Choice of Sikh worship

I chose *Sikhi* with which to engage partly because it is well represented in the area in which I worked, 9.1% of the population of Wolverhampton (the second highest proportion in the country), and 6% across the wider Black Country (UK Census Data 2011; NHS Black Country Partnership, no date). It is an easy community to contact and well-established, not unduly vulnerable in the face of attention. It also represents an under-researched area of Christian interaction compared with Judaism, Islam, Hinduism or Buddhism. Further, I had

experienced Sikh hospitality over the years and knew something of their theological openness while recognising a cultural and historical distinctiveness, a combination I hoped would make for a rich experience.

My choice to engage with Sikhs through attendance at a gurdwara was unreflected, the reflex of a religious professional. A more performative view of religion or a more integrated view of *Sikhi* might have suggested other settings, as later on the streets of Birmingham. Nonetheless there were advantages to meeting in the gurdwara: rituals are the most challenging aspects of a community with power to attract and repel; they are identity markers; and they 'hold the promise of gaining access to the beating heart of another religion', touching those involved at a deep emotional level (Reedjik 2015, 181; Moyaert 2015, 9-10, 3).

ii) Fieldwork

The fieldwork ran from September 2015 to July 2017, with preparatory visits and a sequel. My bishop agreed to my engaging in weekly Sikh worship while continuing to lead Christian worship. The framing necessary to being a researcher inevitably had a distancing effect, as did the cultural, theological, and linguistic distance in my experience of Sikh worship, but I deliberately entered into gurdwara worship unless it made me uneasy (which never arose), a change from my previous stance of merely allowing myself to enter into non-Christian worship if that happened naturally.

Weekly engagement with *Sikhi* was manageable within my work time-table, and might be possible for other DIFAs. Weekly or more frequent attendance at the gurdwara was shown in the *British Sikh Report 2013* as the practice of 39% of Sikhs, so this was a reasonable attendance for me to undertake, though, like a titration, slightly less or more may have produced significantly different results

(*British Sikh Report 2013*, 23). I sought to balance Christian and Sikh worship but the description of dual religious belonging as ‘occurring when a person has a first major religion and draws on a second religion to a greater or lesser degree...’ allowed for some asymmetry in engagement which proved unavoidable (Goosen 2011, 19, italics removed).

I considered taking notes during my visits but was aware of the tension between doing this and immersion in the experience (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 2011, 21-41). I settled on not writing in the field but recording my recollections of church about half an hour after leaving (after my drive to the gurdwara, writing outside church would have invited interruption), and then immediately after leaving the gurdwara, minimising the risk of inaccurate and biased recall (Alaszewski 2006, 26). On a few occasions I had to alter that pattern because of following engagements, but made good as soon as possible. I would then type the notes up later in the week. There were 88 visits to church recorded and 83 to gurdwaras.³¹ They were traditional ethnographic field notes, but I also recorded my own activity and feelings, included any errors, and noted my first-order reflections. I took photographs, a long-standing adjunct of ethnography. They were mainly taken on my phone, offering the immediacy of snapshots and showing the reader the physical context. I also collected 65 artefacts, mainly leaflets, booklets and free newspapers from the gurdwara, but also Sikh outreach material from other sources, and a number of gifts: a Sikh wall calendar, a copy of the gurdwara constitution, and a scarf and engraved plate that were presented to me at the end of the fieldwork. It was not possible to identify church-related

³¹ The discrepancy arose when I was away from home and could get to a church but not to a gurdwara.

items as 'artefacts' as they were the usual acquisitions made in the course of my work.

iii) Extraversion

a) Context

I extraverted my experience by context and interpretation. The context included academic, social and religious interest in MRP, explored through the literature, eighteen interviews and three focus groups. Interviews dealt with: research across cultures (1);³² issues within *Sikhi* (3); choosing to engage with both *Sikhi* and Christianity (3); living in mixed Sikh/Christian families (2); Christians I had taken to the gurdwara (3); conversion from *Sikhi* to Christianity (3); conversion from Christianity – or secular white British culture – to *Sikhi* (2); and practising yoga as an Anglican priest (1). Three of those interviews (two over engagement with both religions, one over conversion from Christianity to *Sikhi*) were conducted by email, the rest were face to face. When face to face I introduced the interviews as being about an hour long, and they were usually close to that. They were semi-structured interviews, in that I had a number of standard questions (Appendix 2), but would then follow up interesting replies (Denscombe 2010, 175). Initial questions were so wide-ranging – 'what were the religious influences on your childhood?' – that they were close to life-history interviews (Kara 2015, 93-94). There were two focus groups, each about an hour and a half long, with different groups of four interfaith colleagues, and one with ten parochial colleagues which lasted just under an hour. From recordings of interviews and focus groups I typed up near-transcripts, tidying grammar and using occasional ellipses where we had wandered away from the subject.

³² The number of interviews with the stated emphasis is in brackets.

b) Interpretation.

Extraversion by interpretation included using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis (Nvivo) to detect themes in notes that might have been overlooked. I considered the significance of the research with others, including selected readers (pp. 49-50) and completed a monthly self-questionnaire as another way of recording my changing views (p. 47). However I tried to restrain premature interpretation to enable my understanding to be led by experience. For the first nine months of research I refrained from reading on *Sikhi* apart from books and web-sites I was given or to which I was recommended in the gurdwara.

iv) Reflection

I keep a research journal in which to record my research process, professional, personal and theological activity, mood and comments. It is written longhand, indicating 'it's about me, my personal stuff' and is confidential, though I used quotations from it in reflective pieces I prepared for supervisions (Boulton 2014, 161). It could have been a 'therapeutic space' for containment of experiences, but has been more somewhere to note otherwise fleeting ideas and emotions for further reflection, enabling contact with my 'enigmatic self' (Boulton 2014, 160, 149).

For an external view of how MRP was affecting my religious identity I arranged to meet quarterly with two collocutors, one Christian (five meetings³³) and one Sikh (eight meetings). Each was invited to interview me and comment on how much they considered me Christian or Sikh, within a set format (Appendix 3). My Christian collocutors were Bardesley, a Methodist minister with

³³ The original interlocutor had to withdraw leading to a break until another took it on.



Figure 1: Devsi as Panj Pyare at Wolverhampton Visakhi celebration.

considerable experience in interfaith matters, and then Dyson, an Anglican priest who had conducted my ministerial development interview for the diocese and demonstrated an interest in this area. The Sikh, Devsi, is *Amritdhari*.³⁴ He is vice-chair of Wolverhampton Interfaith, and chair of BME³⁵ United Co., a Wolverhampton social enterprise. Our

meetings included the assessments envisaged but were more wide-ranging as he schooled me in *Sikhi*.

Pattison's model of critical conversation discussed three strands: a) the experience being examined; b) traditional Christian [and, here, Sikh] beliefs, assumptions and perceptions; and c) my own ideas, beliefs, feelings, perceptions and assumptions (Thompson, with Pattison and Thompson 2008, 61). My collocutors represented the second of those strands. Meetings were recorded with near-transcripts taken, and lasted about an hour.

I also met with my spiritual director, Stobert, a member of the British Council of Counsellors and Psychotherapists and fellow DPT student. We met twelve times at roughly six weekly intervals, for a timed hour, fully noted but not transcribed. This attention to my well-being helped meet one of the university's ethical requirements, and the meetings enabled consideration of different spiritual models for my experience.

³⁴ *Amritdhari*: a Sikh who has received *amrit* and belongs to the *Khalsa*. He or she is expected to adopt the five k's, meditate regularly including before dawn, and be teetotal.

³⁵ Black and Minority Ethnic.

Journal, fieldwork, interviews, focus groups, collocation and guided reflections were drawn on for a reflective piece before each supervision, placing supervisions at the apex of reflection, though within a cyclical aspect. Supervisions changed, with my supervisor being more restrained in sharing his reactions, allowing for my own reflective process. What might have felt an unsettling withdrawal was discussed, and I appreciated the space it gave to our meetings (Scaife 2010, 83).

v) Self-questionnaire

I developed a monthly self-questionnaire concerning my religious identity and reactions to the research (pp. 138-144).

vi) Ethics

My aim was to encourage deepening religious relationships and so advance social and religious harmony. There is no ethical code for DIFAs per se, but there are guidelines for all clergy in the Church of England, which state that:

The clergy should promote reconciliation in the Church and in the world wherever there are divisions, including those which exist between people of different faiths. (Trott 2015, 13)

Ministers who find that they are no longer in good conscience able to believe, hold or teach the Christian faith as the Church of England has received it, are to seek advice and help in deciding whether to continue in public ministry, but that was not the starting point of my research nor did it arise in any acute form (Trott 2015, 13).

The university's ethics process was useful in clarifying my responsibilities. There was concern for myself as researcher, but the stories of many other people and communities were also involved, giving a responsibility to them too

(Denscombe 2010, 213; Kara 2015, 53-54; Tullis 2015, 248).³⁶ I allowed interviewees and participants in focus groups to edit my notes of meetings, sending them together with a form (Appendix 5) seeking permission to quote from them. I invited them to return any amendments or conditions, and received an unusual³⁷ number of cautious responses:

I am happy for you to use the material carefully, i.e. there may be some areas of sensitivity where quoting me verbatim may not be helpful. I'm sure you'll recognise such places...

'I would like the use of the Sikh scriptures in our church to be anonymous.'

'You can use the notes, but I do need complete anonymity please - no indication who comments are from in the thesis please.'

There were also amendments protecting the identities of third parties or moderating blunt language. These responses increased my awareness of the sensitivity of Christians engaging in the worship of other religions, and of issues surrounding Sikh identity, and I complied with them all.

As to the fieldwork, I had permission to research from the governing councils of the locations but not from individuals. I followed the general guidelines of informed consent: prohibition of deception, privacy, confidentiality and accuracy, along with the golden thread of 'do no harm,' remembering the caveats 'do not [...] publish anything you would not show the persons mentioned in the text' and 'do not underestimate the afterlife of a published narrative' (Tullis 2015, 246, 249, 257). Generally I did not identify individuals in those settings, inevitably reducing characterisation in the narrative. There were also ethical and power

³⁶ 'There is a psychological danger resulting from the dual existence demanded of fieldwork such as this. The lifestyle, at its worst, can have something of a traumatic effect on the researcher, or can have a lasting or permanent effect on the researcher's identity' (Denscombe 2010, 213).

³⁷ According to my supervisor.

issues over photographs, such that pictures of people and the sense of energy they bring are largely absent (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 148; Pink 2001, 37).

In the university's procedure for obtaining ethical approval I was asked about a statement I had made that the fact that the communities where I was doing my fieldwork were identified 'will need to be borne in mind at every stage of the research.' I replied as follows:

This relates to any negative perceptions the researcher may form in either Christian or Sikh settings. It is ideal to record the experience [...] as thoroughly and accurately as possible, not just with regard to the final position reached but also as to perceptions and understandings (some perhaps erroneous) on the way. However it may be necessary to omit or amend such impressions if: they relate to particular individuals; their expression is likely to harm Christian/Sikh relations; their expression is likely to be injurious to the congregations or faiths concerned [...] There is a need to achieve both truth and usefulness which may require managing, e.g. by referring to negative issues in more theoretical terms rather than as rooted in specific attributed experiences, or by some disguising of the persons or situations concerned.

Even showing a late draft to representatives of the two communities did not absolve me of the responsibility to make these decisions as I felt (unlike with the texts of the interviews) a responsibility to retain editorial control of my own description of events and impressions. This had to be a matter of judgement, with the liberty and the responsibility that entailed (Falcone 2010, 273-274).

vii) Reciprocity

Reciprocity is a feature of autoethnography (Adams, Jones and Ellis 2015, 34-36). In my agreements with church and gurdwara I committed myself to discuss matters as we proceeded, and to report back to them after twelve months (Appendix 7). I took up the offer to write in a Punjabi newspaper to relate to the wider Sikh community (Appendix 8), and a member from the gurdwara and one

from church read a late draft of the thesis with the invitation to comment, and to share it with fellow worshippers as they saw fit. Three colleagues, the collocutors, my reflective guide and a family member were also invited to do so, along with a couple of academic readers, partly to improve the quality of the final draft, but also to express accountability.

viii) Summary

My method was to participate in Christian and Sikh worship; write up that experience with initial reflections in field notes; contextualise the experience by reading and interviews; reflect on it in my journal, in meetings with my collocutors, in guided reflection and supervision, and share and test this experience with others as I wrote it into a reflective narrative memoir.

5. SETTLING IN

A) Fieldwork

i) Back on track

The research was founded on weekly attendance at church and gurdwara, something which the meeting described in Chapter 1 had stymied. As for church, after informal conversations I put my request to Church Council, explained what I was about, and then left the room. They gave their consent to my writing about my experience with them and to my engagement with *Sikhi*, and some showed continued interest and encouragement throughout the research. I knew of no anxiety at any stage.

Discussion was continuing with the first gurdwara as my original contact tried to get the decision changed, before developing a growing awareness of difficulties. I turned to my Sikh collocutor, Devsi, who started negotiations at his own gurdwara, following a recognised ethnographic pattern of informal sponsorship by a pre-existing acquaintance (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 47). Discussions there also moved slowly, but after several weeks I was invited to attend a committee meeting. I had the university-approved paperwork with me, this time presented in the name of my supervisor and incorporating the university crest (Appendix 4). About nine middle-aged or elderly men were sat round a table. I explained the project, its limited life-span and benevolent intention, not claiming expertise in *Sikhi* but wanting to experience worshipping in two religions. Devsi acted as my advocate, stressing that it would publicise the gurdwara and help to make *Sikhi* better known. After some questions I withdrew, but they soon called me back and agreed to the research, exchanging pleasantries as the president signed the approval letter. I was aware that Devsi's line of argument

had put me under an obligation to benefit my hosts,³⁸ and was starkly aware that permission was dependent on friendship; that which I had characterised as insufficiently theologically rigorous at the start of the research had proved to be its saviour.

ii) A normal day in church

a) Background

There was throughout the fieldwork a heart-beat of worship, week by week. As my research began I had been at Beacon Church for a couple



Figure 2: Beacon Church Pheasey.

of years. It was a local ecumenical partnership between Anglicans and Methodists serving a pair of settled outer estates of 8,613 people (Robathan, 2010; Presence and Engagement, no date). The church was consecrated in 1964 by the Church of England before being extended with money from the sale of a nearby Methodist church and taking the name 'Beacon Church'.

The entrance was from a small carpark into a light hall, from which led a community hall and smaller rooms and kitchens. Down a corridor was the worship area with 90 chairs set in a quarter circle round a dais supporting the holy table, lectern, and prayer desks. There was an organ to the left, and a

³⁸ Devsi commented on reading this: 'the question "what are we going to get out of it?" usually refers to money. You have answered that now, you will publicise the name of GKN, what more can you have?'

concrete font by the door, with children's toys and books to the back right. Warm air heating was noisy but effective, contributing to an inviting area clearly intended for worship though useable in other ways as well.

Anglicans and Methodists worshipped there as a joint congregation and after twenty years were well integrated, though some carried denominational traditions with them in a relaxed way. A usual congregation of the time was just over 30 older white British people, the majority of whom were women. The ethnicity but neither the age nor the gender balance matched the local context.



Figure 3: Beacon Church worship area.

A group of about a dozen who had come from the local evangelical church hired a room; they usually worshipped separately but we joined up on special occasions, and for coffee. Other regular activities in the building were uniformed children's organisations and commercial activities such as slimming clubs, and there were occasional social and fund-raising events.

b) My own engagement

I moved there in October 2013 from another parish, one half-time post replacing another, alongside my interfaith role, and was authorised as the congregation's Methodist minister as well as their Anglican priest. Once a month I was at another Methodist Church on circuit and I joined in Methodist as well as Anglican meetings.

c) Before the service

As soon as I was up and dressed I would go over my sermon, using the anxiety of the approaching service to sharpen work done earlier. The theme would be drawn from set scripture readings, and the hymns already chosen and given to the four-person choir. In preparation for the gurdwara I would put headscarf, recorder, and a copy of some prayers in the car.

I noted how I felt as I arrived in church, and there were sometimes hints of weariness: 'there in good time but not feeling very inspired. Nervous – why? Thought how marvellous it would be to just run away.'³⁹ These feelings dissipated as the morning progressed, and as I got nearer to retirement. In contrast I noted



Figure 4: Communion table, with Anglican chalice and Methodist glasses.

on another Sunday: 'had a feeling that everything was flowing well although I knew objectively I might have expected to be over-tired. Everything seemed to be in God's hand somehow.' If it was

³⁹ Throughout the thesis quotations without references are edited extracts from my own field notes, journal, or transcripts of interviews or other meetings.

Communion (1st and 3rd Sundays) stewards would lay the table with the chalice and set out bread and wine at the back of church to be brought up. There would be a cruet of wine to go in the chalice and a rack of individual small glasses filled with non-alcoholic wine. Someone may have provided a loaf, otherwise wafers would be used. Generally the mood was good and one Sunday I noted church officers 'giggling away and generally contented,' but there was an occasional hint of irritation: 'she said she was fine, she was just helping out, but it felt there was a bit of significance there.' There was news of members of the congregation who were unwell, or of families or neighbours in difficulties. I noted anxiety over deafness, disappointment over a cataract operation, a husband with skin cancer. Someone had been poorly and 'I felt a bit sheepish about not having noticed he was missing.' A request to see me afterwards 'left me wondering what was up, and that was in the back of my mind during the service.' People were getting refreshments ready for afterwards, but only those with a responsibility were around until the last ten minutes when others would begin to gather, most leaving



Figure 5: The author before Communion.

it till the last moment.

As we approached the start of the service I met in the vestry with the worship stewards and server. Being prayed over in the Methodist manner was calming and

focussing, rather than leading the prayer myself as Anglicans usually do.

d) The service

The congregation stood to sing the first hymn and for Communion the server, carrying the processional cross, led me in, both wearing cassock-albs, me with a stole. For a Service of the Word I wore suit and clerical collar and entered alone and more briskly. I introduced the theme before continuing according to the day's order of service, the congregation making the responses. I was always aware of the clock at the back of the church, and found 'timing' to be a much used node in coding my Christian service notes.

A service rarely went without a glitch. There were problems with the microphones, projector or, occasionally, the music box. Straightforward human errors also cropped up as my concentration flagged, or occasionally from others. I regularly noted my frustration, together with the hope that it did not show too much. I was not sure if it irritated the congregation as much as me. For better or worse they were used to it.

I used doctrinal theology cautiously -

My theme was about the cosmic glory of Christ, and I realised that sounded windy so my punchline was that even words of theology and poetry can matter because they change our attitudes to life and so to each other.

If I preached conservatively
that could produce anxiety.
One Covenant Sunday I
preached 'at full throttle' but
felt uncomfortable
encouraging the
perfectionism of Wesleyism
which 'seems part of a cycle



Figure 6: Extracts from *The Methodist Covenant Prayer*.

of high expectations and either failure or hypocrisy.’ I questioned why I ‘banged on about it so much,’ deciding that I was trying to be fair to the Methodist tradition, but was still ‘guilty of preaching what I didn’t believe to please a section of the congregation.’

Looking back on my themes a number were about persistence, reflecting my personal situation but also that of the congregation. They also showed a liberal tendency: One sermon about faith and doubt claimed that faith in action is more important than theoretical faith, to which I added the note: ‘very PT!’ I had spotted a survey about many Christians not believing in the resurrection, and said there is little point in trying to argue them into it or say they should, but the best thing to do was ‘just to lead a life of faith and hope,’ and that this was the main test (BBC, 2017).

As I preached there were moments of *hwy*⁴⁰ for me and perhaps for the congregation. Once I read the short verse of St Patrick’s breastplate⁴¹ and it was followed by ‘a powerful moment with quite a response as everything stilled down; one of those strange moments that catch your throat.’ The intercessions, led by people on the rota, were all prepared carefully. I relaxed slightly, and my attention sometimes wandered. The peace, during which people moved round church greeting each other, led to a general outpouring of conversation. It was only by announcing the next hymn that this was drawn to a close.

For Communion, as I went through the Eucharistic prayer I did my best to inhabit the present moment and the moment of the last supper at the same time;

⁴⁰ (in Welsh use) a stirring feeling of emotional motivation and energy.

⁴¹ ‘Christ be with me, Christ within me, | Christ behind me, Christ before me, | Christ beside me, Christ to win me, | Christ to comfort and restore me; | Christ beneath me, Christ above me, | Christ in quiet, Christ in danger, | Christ in hearts of all that love me, | Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

on one occasion noting: I ‘realised I was skimming, and slammed the brakes on.’ This is a moment that still strikes me with awe, and that awe carried on into the distribution of Communion. I invited anyone ‘who loves the Lord’ to receive, a more open table than I kept as an Anglican but a common phrase in Methodism, paralleled for me by the open sharing of holy food, *karah parshad*⁴², at the gurdwara. After the post-communion prayer there were notices about future events, then a final hymn, blessing and out.

e) After the service

Conversation over coffee was unhurried and included serious family matters: the anniversary of a mother’s death; problems at work; a grandchild suffering from depression; an expectant daughter overdue; a disabled daughter’s assessment for benefits; a son struck by a virus making him confused and physically unstable. There were issues of community interest: someone working with drug addicts; a phone mast planned outside the church; the closure of the Boys’ Brigade company. There were emotionally charged trivia: who has access to which cupboards; or, on Easter Day, which church fund should pay for a new urn. There were informal and whimsical moments: admiring family photographs; playing with someone’s dog; recollections of Winson Green prison on hanging days,⁴³ and reports on an experiment exposing tomato plants to a magnetic field. Once I would have stayed till the end and helped tidy up, but fieldwork at the gurdwara meant time was pressing, and, as numbers thinned out, I said my goodbyes and drove off to the gurdwara, usually a journey of 25 minutes.

⁴² A warm, sweet dough made of wheat flour, sugar, and clarified butter, a sign of God’s grace.

⁴³ Recalling two notices on the door, the first announcing the execution, the next an hour later recording the burial, ‘up at eight, down at nine.’

f) Immediate reactions

The field notes have regular entries such as 'lovely atmosphere,' 'it was an upbeat sort of day,' 'it was a happy service and people seemed happy with it'; though this is clearly partial in both senses -

afterwards it all seems very good-humoured, but [...my wife] tells me there has been some loud criticism of [...a participant in the service] for not doing things right. I hadn't noticed.

As to my inner reflections I journaled –

Am I just going through the motions like the functionary I sound? I energise myself to try to put some life into the service, but it is only during the sermon and the Communion when we have one that I have any sense of something happening to me. Sometimes that is some sense of conviction and of the significance of what I am saying, a sort of feedback, but more often it takes the form of a love for the people I am with. That is pretty sentimental, but sentiment is important too, if only in spurring me on in my ministry to them. It may not sound much like a relationship with God, but it feels quite a pure one to me, and it cuts through any weariness and futility.

g) *Sikhi* at church

Leading of worship did not seem to have been changed by engagement with *Sikhi*, but there were a few moments of comparison. When preaching about baptism I reflected on -

the work on identity I am doing with the Sikhs, remembering [the family from a Sikh background at a Christian church] who will take Communion but not be baptised;

I recalled -

Amy⁴⁴ feels there is something missing with no outward reverences at Beacon Church. I still find it hard not to bow to the table (which would be a bit hyper-Anglican and show offy) and the Sikh obeisance has become important to me.

⁴⁴ Not her real name.

‘[before the service] I had time to meditate and used ‘*maranatha Waheguru*,’⁴⁵ and I don’t think that felt odd, it felt fine really.’ On other occasions there was some disquiet, referred to in ‘challenges’ (p. 90).

I rarely referred to interreligious experience in my preaching though once I recalled a Sikh convert to Christianity ‘and how she had reminded me of the new life of Christianity’, and one St George’s Day I preached that ‘identity can either be formed by who we are opposed to or who we have links to’ and noted ‘connected with my research.’

iii) A normal day at the gurdwara

This passage reads more like a straightforward piece of ethnographic fieldwork because that sense of watching and listening, not pushing myself forward, reflected my observer-like initial position.

a) Arriving



Figure 7: Guru Ka Niwas Gurdwara, Wolverhampton.

⁴⁵ *Waheguru*: ‘The Wonderful One’, a term used by Sikhs for the Absolute and used in *simran*, meditation. *Maranatha*: Aramaic word meaning ‘come Lord’ or ‘our Lord has come’ (1 Corinthians 16:22), used as a mantra by the *World Community for Christian Meditation*. I used them in this way to bring Sikh and Christian meditation together.

*Guru Ka Niwas*⁴⁶ (GKN) Gurdwara stands back from a busy dual carriageway, and has a new housing estate behind it. It has hardly changed externally (it is a listed building) from when it was built in the 1950's for Guest Keen and Nettlefold engineering, and it still carries the GKN logo, albeit with a new meaning. It has a lawned area at the front and car-parking along a road going round the inside perimeter of the site and opening to a yard at the back.

I recorded impressions of the service I had left behind at Beacon Church, put on my



Figure 8: Notice board, GKN Gurdwara.

headscarf (still wearing my clerical collar), took my copies of the prayers, the *Ardas*⁴⁷, and walked up. There is evidence of the building's new use outside: signs giving the name of the gurdwara in full, identifying it as *Ramgarhia*, a specific social grouping; and an orange flag (*Nishan Sahib*) on a large orange-



Figure 9: Unfurling Nishan Sahib, GKN Gurdwara.

swathed pole. As I walk past memories of dressing the pole return. A new sheath was put on, censed and perfumed, a new flag attached, and the pole raised -

They pulled the twine to release the flag and with it had come a cloud of petals, a great many of which had fallen on me. I was the butt of some good-natured laughter, but people came over to

⁴⁶ 'Abode of the Guru.'

⁴⁷ Prayer of supplication, part of daily prayer in the gurdwara.

say how lucky it was and began to gather the petals from under me. It had felt a notable bonding experience.

There is nothing special for Sikhs about Sunday morning, but that is usually the busiest time at GKN and other gurdwaras, fitting in with the wider British pattern of public worship. Sometimes there is a special family event, a 'programme,' going on, something I can⁴⁸ tell by the number of cars outside. If there is a wedding people will be stood outside in their finery. As I walk I put on the headscarf, and remember wearing a hat at the first gurdwara, one I had worn for a while as interfaith officer without comment. As I went to meet the secretary I was told 'you had better take off that hat, it is a Muslim hat.' Devsi commented that Guru Nanak himself often wore 'Muslim' clothes, and this was an ignorant instruction, but what struck me was my abrupt change in status, from respected guest to ill-informed student.

By the gurdwara door is a grey car emblazoned with the gurdwara's name.



Figure 10: Car for transporting Guru Granth Sahib Ji.

It is used for transporting *Guru Granth Sahib Ji* to people's homes to bless them on special occasions, and the front passenger seat has a special rest for the holy book. Once when they were preparing to go

⁴⁸ I use the past tense to describe my engagement with Beacon Church which ceased on retirement, but use the present tense to describe observations in the gurdwara as I am still attending at the time of writing.

out they invited me to join them but I had a wedding to take and missed the opportunity, never repeated.

As I went into the gurdwara I used to see the building work on the new hall (now complete). I see the service progressing on an overhead screen ahead. Displayed on the walls are the *Mool Mantra* (the prayer with which *Guru Granth*

Sahib Ji commences); a logo for the gurdwara itself, and the Sikh national anthem. Opposite is written,



Figure 11: Welcome display at GKN Gurdwara.

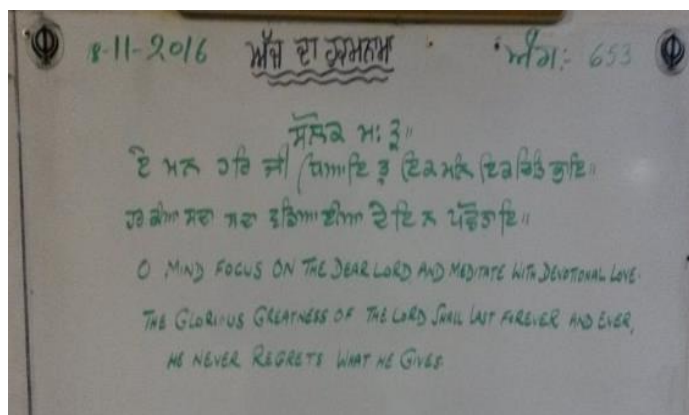


Figure 12: Hukamnama, GKN Gurdwara, 8 November 2016.

sometimes in English as well as Gurmukhi, the *hukamnama*, the scripture chosen for the day. I slip my shoes off and put them in the shoe locker, wash my hands and go into the worship room, the *darbar*.

b) Worship

I make my £5 donation at the desk by the door which feels a significant aspect of my opting in, then move forward to do obeisance before *Guru Granth Sahib Ji*. I bow my head, place a coin in a long box there, then kneel, move forward

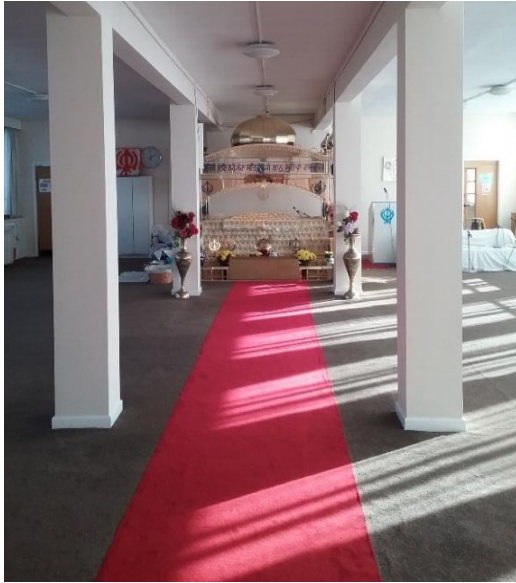


Figure 13: Durbar, GKN Gurdwara.

onto my hands and touch my forehead to the carpet. I stand, bow again, and then sit down on the men's side. The first time I did this was in retrospect important, having merely bowed my head on previous visits to gurdwaras, but I had followed Devsi and noted 'I hesitated but it seemed a natural thing to do, not the great "crossing a threshold" feeling I had

expected.' As to whether it is idolatry, it is worship but that does not necessarily imply the object of worship is divine.⁴⁹ For Sikhs the gurus, including *Guru Granth Sahib Ji*, are channels of God's grace but not themselves divine, so I am not bowing down to 'another God', leaving aside the issue of whether the Sikh divinity is other to the Judeo-Christian God. All this I might have trotted out as theological justification. The truth is that at the time it felt more liberating than shameful, part of the opening into which Christ has called me.

Despite the soft carpet I am still uncomfortable sitting cross-legged on the floor, sometimes nonetheless keeping it up for over two hours. I was complimented in the early days on sitting upright, encouraging me to try to maintain good posture. I sit cross-legged, but cannot just rest my arms on my knees, needing to hug them to keep myself up, and so bending my back. I have recorded stiff knees and hips, even a stiff neck, but at other times it is easier. I noticed the apparent ease with which some maintained an upright position and

⁴⁹ In the 1662 Anglican wedding service the groom worships the bride – he gives her true value – as he gives her the ring: '[...w]ith this ring I thee wed, with my body I thee worship'...

the sprawling sideways-sitting of others. There is a carpeted bench by the back wall, technically part of the floor because Sikhs sit in equality on the floor below *Guru Granth Sahib Ji*, though GKN is not strict about this and chairs often appear as well (Cole 2003, 3). Bench and chairs are used by the elderly and the frail, but anyone can support their backs by sitting along the side wall, the committee sitting at the front. I usually sit in the middle of the floor towards the back, but on quieter days have sat against the wall. Once I stretched out and was told that my legs were too extended which could be offensive. Other people were doing this, but I was told 'you need to know the proper way of doing things.' There is less anxiety about physical contact than among white British, so there are unapologetic nudges as neighbours shift positions.⁵⁰

About half the men are turbaned, the rest wearing headscarves. Some wear the tightly pleated turbans of East Africa, others the looser Indian style. Most wear western dress. The women wear headscarves, mainly with the *salwar kameez*,⁵¹ women do not wear turbans here though it is not unusual in other gurdwaras. There are a few children scattered around, moving between the men's and women's side without tension. Some people are very reverent, others quite casual, chatting or using their phones.

The *takhat*, or throne, is central at the front, golden, with Gurmukhi script on it and ornamental lights in the canopy. *Guru Granth Sahib Ji* is covered with and laid on embroidered cloth, often brightly coloured, and behind it stands or sits someone, usually a man, often one of the *grantis*, but sometimes a woman

⁵⁰ On reading this Devsi commented: 'Every country is changing on this. For example, formerly you would touch a child on entering a family situation, but not now in Britain. Men and women can sit together in the older gurdwaras in India, but now women prefer not be touched by men.'

⁵¹ Trouser suit commonly worn in Pakistan and India.

or even a child, using *chaur sahib*, the ceremonial fly whisk, signifying reverence of the scripture. In front is the cash box, and donated ornamental cloths, flowers and food. A few people walk clockwise round Guru Granth Sahib, removing socks as well as shoes, an additional sign of respect on going behind the *takhat*.



Figure 14: Takhat for Guru Granth Sahib Ji, GKN Gurdwara.

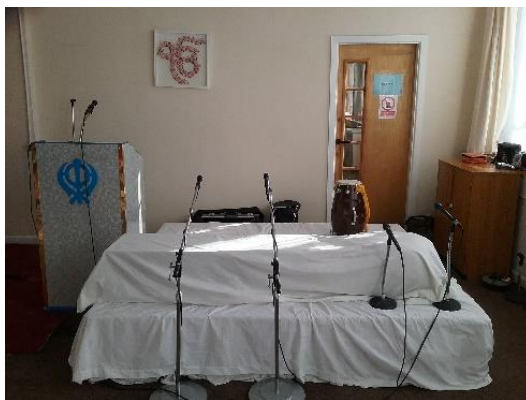


Figure 15: Musicians' platform, GKN Gurdwara.

To the right of the *takhat* is a stage for the musicians, designed so that they are sitting lower than *Guru Granth Sahib Ji*. The three musicians, who usually include at least one of the *grantis*, play *tabla* and harmonium, and sing. The congregation sometimes joins in repeated choruses or

particularly well know *kirtan*, hymns. Despite encouraging me to learn Punjabi the secretary said just hearing *kirtan* would be beneficial, and Devsi said many people there do not understand what they hear but it is medicine for the soul,

healing them without their understanding why. A white Canadian convert to *Sikhi* told me he found *simran*, the repetition of '*Waheguru*'⁵² in a meditative context, an incomparable way of leaving behind the ego. I join in the repetitive choruses, or quietly repeat '*Waheguru*', sometimes alternating with the Christian '*maranatha*.'

One morning I was moved by a solo when every part of the *tabla*⁵³ was being used with a wide range of tonality and a haunting irregular beat, like raindrops before the storm. I felt as though my soul was being washed. When I opened my eyes it was just the drums being tuned, but that move from the tentative and the irregular to a confident rhythm can still affect me. At other times I am drowsy and suddenly come to, hard to distinguish coming out of a meditative state from simply waking up. Between the songs someone, usually a *granthi* or the secretary, may give a short address, occasionally including a few words of English. People go forward and put money in front of the singers, bowing to *Guru Granth Sahib Ji* as they do so. This may be kept by visiting musicians of note, but most Sundays it goes into the building fund. Sometimes there is a notice encouraging such donations, but I usually stick at my regular donation.

The prayers, the *Ardas*, invoke institutions and heroes of *Sikhi*, with me following a translation. During the prayers donations are read out with accompanying prayer requests and I listen for my name. It is strange that I easily accepted this public announcement of the connected donation and prayer, so different from the church practice of confidential giving. The covers are then removed from *Guru Granth Sahib Ji* and the *hukamnama* is read, the instruction

⁵² Said in such a way as to only take two syllables: '*Wah Gru*.'

⁵³ Pair of small drums.

for the day, theoretically at random but always from the more central of the 1430 pages. As this happens people used to go out to the *langar* hall, but after some



Figure 16: Place for preparing karah parshad, GKN Gurdwara.

months the secretary told them to stay, which they did, an unusual example of practice coming into line with what I thought should happen. With the reading the *granthi* sometimes gives a short address, further shortened after people were asked to stay in. The stage secretary then gives out notices and may add a short homily of his own. Meanwhile one of the

granthis inserts a *kirpan*⁵⁴ in the *karah parshad* warming on a hotplate next to the *takhat*.⁵⁵ This is a mixture of wheat flour, sugar and butter, intended to be easy to digest for young and old, a sign of the receiving of God's grace; not the identity marker of Christian Communion but shared with any visitor. As I receive cross-legged on the floor I am sometimes greeted in English, 'hello John', replying 'shukriya', thank you.

c) After worship

Once after the service I watched an older man come in, speak to one of the *granthis*, have a reading from *Guru Granth Sahib Ji*, and then have something

⁵⁴ *Kirpan*: knife. The word is derived from *kirpa*, 'kindness', and *an*, 'honour'. The *kirpan* should be used with kindness and honour, for justice not aggression – Devsi.

⁵⁵ I originally wrote that a *granthi* used a knife to stir the *karah parshad*. On reading this Devsi told me that is incorrect and that this modest action has great significance. It is an offering of the food and of those present to the Guru, and as the *kirpan* enters the *karah parshad* so the Guru enters. Five portions are taken out which may be put before *Guru Granth Sahib Ji*, then distributed as signs of special respect, or mixed back in. It sounded comparable to the fraction at the Eucharist.

written out and given to him. Later I discovered that I had been watching the naming ceremony for his new-born grandchild, *naam karan*, in which the first letter of the chosen name⁵⁶ is taken from the first letter of a randomly selected reading (Cole 2003, 60). I had read about this, and yet when it was happening in front of me I did not realise it. In what sense had I really 'seen' it at all, without understanding, and in what sense had I 'understood' it when reading if I could not then recognise it?

Devsī and I usually meet as we queue for the meal, *langar*, and others come and greet us, the president often shares a few encouraging words, and the stage secretary offers advice. When I was new I was often invited to *langar* as I settled to worship, but preferred to feed afterwards, influenced by the Christian custom of refreshments after services. I noted:

'what lies behind these differences, attitudes towards grace and worthiness? Do Christians need to be clean (by fasting and penitence) before Communion whereas for Sikhs it is the *simran* itself that makes clean?'

Then the secretary announced that people really should wait for *langar* until after



Figure 17: The kitchens, GKN Gurdwara.

they had worshipped, not being hungry or having come far as in India. This seemed to be a movement away from Indian roots toward a British Christian practice.

If there is a family programme the hall may be filled with people who have been there for some time.

⁵⁶ Or two letters: Devsī.

We take metal trays and they are filled at the counter by volunteers doing their *seva*.⁵⁷ The food includes yoghurt, a lentil-based spicy food, and some vegetables, again spiced. There are chapatis and rice pudding, and a metal cup of water. Sweets and pickles may appear or even slices of a celebration cake if there is a programme. I sit by Devsi, or with other people I know, usually the younger ones who are happy to converse in English. I may ask what the *granthi* or the secretary have been talking about, or what programme is being celebrated, but talk ranges across British and Punjabi politics, business, news events, gurdwara organisation, Sikh tradition and practice, and family news. Occasionally people ask about Christianity, and older members sometimes reminisce about experiences in Britain, India or Africa. Others eat quickly and depart without talking, a pattern which I saw with relief was quite normal, not because I had sat there. Women and men usually sit separately, but there are some family groups, and when tables get full women and men mix just to get a place. If I have time I help with the washing up. Although this is an important form of *seva* the men are not always in evidence but I am happy to join in. There is no language barrier in washing up, it gives an easy opportunity to engage with some of the women, and it is important spiritually as a part of my Sikh engagement.⁵⁸ I worried that in my rush to leave Beacon church I never helped those washing up there.

As I go out a number of senior committee members are counting the money in the *darbar* hall, with older folk sitting chatting at the back. There may be someone reading from *Guru Granth Sahib Ji*, often a woman at that stage. I

⁵⁷ *Seva*: service which is performed without any expectation of reward.

⁵⁸ The secretary told me about a famous poet attending a gurdwara who was chided for joining in the washing up. He replied 'I am not washing the dishes but my soul.'

collect my shoes, perhaps exchange further greetings in the hall and head back to the car.

d) Being Christian in the Gurdwara

I wore my clerical collar until retirement, and conversation sometimes related to my Christian background:-

Someone asked me why Jesus had to die on the cross. I began to run through some of the atonement ideas, but it didn't feel very convincing to me and clearly wasn't to him either...

Sikhs have little truck with ideas of atonement for sin, but recognise the place of martyrdom as witness against autocratic power (Singh, S. D., no date). Can the death of Jesus be understood in that way without eviscerating the Christian gospel? His death seems (referring back to my vision) to be part of the shadow shape of his humanity *and* light of his glory but pretty inscrutable, and my failure to explain this disturbed me.

I felt more satisfied with my response to another question-

A teacher was saying the children have trouble with the idea of healing, and asked what I thought. I said the mystery of prayerful healing is something you only discover when you have been praying for someone and they haven't been healed and on other occasions you have seen miraculous healing, and then you realise it is in God's sovereign hand. The idea of God's name being a healing thing is important for some Sikhs, so I talked about the disciples' use of the name of Jesus in the Acts of the Apostles [e.g Acts 4:10].

iv) Comparing the experiences

Church and gurdwara represent different religions, different groups of people, and met in different locations at slightly different times. In church I sat on a chair, in the gurdwara on the floor, and my role was completely different. In the church I understood the language but in the gurdwara I was relying on others to explain what was being said. In the church the conduct of the service was in my hands

and a lot of it in my voice. With that came the security of knowing my role but also anxiety over performance, tied up with my personal and professional integrity. In the gurdwara I was a guest with few responsibilities, greeted kindly by many, occasionally corrected, but marginal to events, giving a feeling of liberation.

As to similarities, they were on the same morning, public gatherings, in places of worship with a focus – holy table or *Guru Granth Sahib Ji* - in the centre at the front both with an aisle leading to them. I attended both acts of worship for about the same time, both had a key role for scripture and music, paid worship leaders, teaching on the tradition, intercessions, collections, and holy food and both concluded with refreshments. Language, sound as well as meaning, and physical posture were significant to both. Although I was much more distracted at church my underlying attitude, of adoration, intercession and submission was the same. To start with I was more aware of myself as an observer in the gurdwara, but as the pattern of reporting on my visit to church developed my awareness of my observer status there increased, while in contrast as I became more familiar with the gurdwara my sense of being an outsider reduced.

v) *Variations*

a) The strangeness of circuit

The insider/outsider distinction was further blurred when I was taking services on circuit, sometimes feeling less familiar than attendance at the gurdwara. To start with I followed the structure in the Methodist Worship Book to the letter, modelling the content on the examples provided (Methodist Church [Great Britain] 1999). When I asked people how they had found the service I got a reply that it had

been a pleasant change, but when I casually asked 'In what way, change?' I was left none the wiser. During the first Communion on circuit at which I presided -

I hadn't realised that when people had received Communion they needed dismissal, so everyone stayed at the rail and I asked the steward what to do or say. He said 'you have to dismiss them', and I had to ask 'what do I do to dismiss them?', and so he told me to say a line of a prayer, and off they went.

These things were not always denominational. At one church the holy table had on it a pyramid with illustrations which didn't seem to have any Christian significance. I never asked what it or why it was there.



Figure 18: Unidentified object on Communion Table.

There were also less tangible signs of my unfamiliarity with Methodism, as when the circuit superintendent advised me to offer to chair the church council, something automatic in the Church of England. We had a coach trip to the Methodist ordination in Liverpool's Anglican cathedral, an occasion similar to my own ordination in form, but someone

explained to me that the new ministers were already presbyters before the service by virtue of a motion in conference receiving them into full connection, the ordination being a prayer for the ministry that had already begun (Methodist Conference 2012, 553-554). I had a theological and emotional commitment to the process of ordination I knew, but my friendship with and appreciation of Methodist colleagues ruled out doubting the validity of this different approach.

b) Variations at the gurdwara

There are frequently programmes for weddings, engagements, significant birthdays, or anniversaries of deaths. The congregation and especially the *langar*

hall is filled with people, the age range often drops and more English is spoken. The women are often in ornate clothing and jewellery, the men in suits, more in headscarves than turbans. The families provide *langar*, a considerable financial outlay, £ 500 or so, and there may be the singing of 'happy birthday' and a cake-cutting ceremony in the *langar* hall.

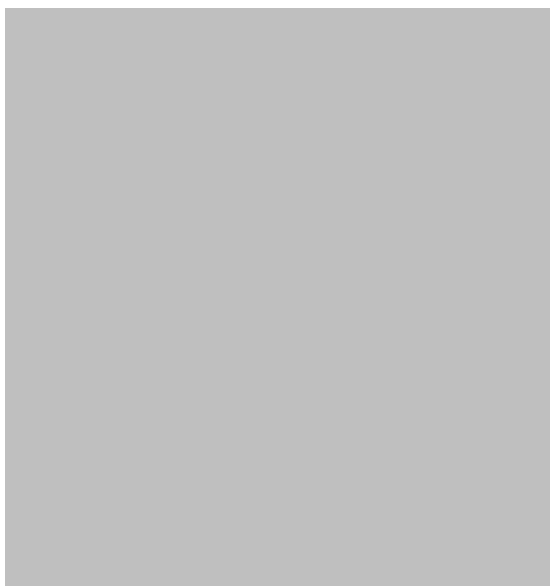


Figure 19: Card celebrating
Guru Nanak's birthday.

There were other days too where it was busier, including first Sundays of the month when people would gather to hear the text for that month read after the daily *hukamnama*, days of remembrance for the birth or death of a Guru, and the greatest celebration, *Vaisakhi*, marking the foundation of the *Khalsa*. On each of these there would be

an added excitement, and talks on the subject concerned. Devsi gave me a calendar so that I could see these holy days and the monthly pattern coming up. For *Vaisakhi* I joined the celebrations in West Park (not on the actual date) and was struck as I went past the stage that once I had been up there in my role as Interfaith Officer representing not just the Bishop but all Christians in giving a greeting that seemed to be respectfully received. Now it seemed inappropriate to sit next to the president of my own gurdwara, with people knowing about my stumbling efforts to grasp Sikh practice. I had been reduced to the role of an elementary student, but also felt that I had gained something, and could commend it to other DIFAs, because it relieved the sense of being an imposter that the role of advising on all religions inevitably entails.

Occasionally I would not be able to get to GKN at the usual time. Then I might go on a Saturday, or first thing on Sunday. Unless there was a programme it would be quiet with just two or three people there. The *prasad*⁵⁹ might be fruit and nuts, but there was always something available in the *langar* hall. I would sit more comfortably by the wall, and the few people drifting through were likely to stop to chat. Such times encouraged reflection, as when waiting for the gurdwara to be unlocked at 4-45 one frosty March morning-

I stood there, cold at first but then feeling that strange heat that can come if you think yourself warm, listening to the birds and trying to meditate. I remembered the people I had seen kneeling to touch the step on entrance. I was quite worshipful for a few minutes, '*maranatha Waheguru*', as I looked into the CCTV screen showing the worship area.

I began to feel cold again as 5-00 a.m. passed, but the *granthi* came over in his dressing gown, opened the door and went away again. I was there for the procession of *Guru Granth Sahib Ji*, which was brought past me from the *sach khand* or resting place, as I was having a cup of tea in the *langar* hall.

There was a block of new flats next door and I had this little fantasy about our living next to the gurdwara and being able to go any time. The fantasy didn't last long because I had to rush off to church.

There was another early Sunday morning when I was there to help put out of the long sheets that cover the floor -

It took twenty minutes. I was worried I might run out of time, but we got it done and when we had finished they thanked me for my help. There is something nice about doing these practical things of worship together that I remember from being a server at church.

I had wondered if I would be invited up to the *sach khand*, and later one of the trustees took me there on a tour of the building.

⁵⁹ Food-offering to God, consumed after worship.

Beds with metal, tubular frames, and fairly plain red cloth over them. We thought there were four *Guru Granth Sahib Ji* there, trying to count them under the bedspreads. It reminded me of pyjamas and more soberly of graves.

We went into the large hall upstairs with the weak floor. There was a roped off area in the middle to prevent anyone walking over *Guru Granth Sahib Ji* on the floor below. There had been some development, but the trustee reflected that because of the floor the money spent on this had most likely been wasted. He said 'you are doing a doctorate. You need to know these things.' I had heard others criticisms of the management and finances, but no more than in any other community. There was an openness in sharing these matters that reflected well on the culture in GKN gurdwara, an openness matched by the layout of the building, with its wide windows and open plan.⁶⁰ This contrasts with some other gurdwaras where the management of large sums of money and different ideas about *Sikhi* can lead to standoffs that last for years, punctuated by court cases and even violence, something off-putting for Punjabi Sikhs themselves⁶¹ (e.g. *Express and Star* 2015). The one genuine conflict in the period at GKN, which I shall refer to in as much as it affected me, was dealt with effectively, openly, and, as far as I could tell, fairly.

B) Reflections

i) Language difficulty

As the tour with the trustee ended we met a woman who was thinking of opening a Punjabi class for children at the gurdwara, to which she also invited me. It was the first such class in my time at GKN despite their availability in other gurdwaras.

⁶⁰ Though there were some dingier rooms downstairs.

⁶¹ 32.3 % of Sikhs are put off attending gurdwaras by management committee politics (*British Sikh Report* 2013, 21).

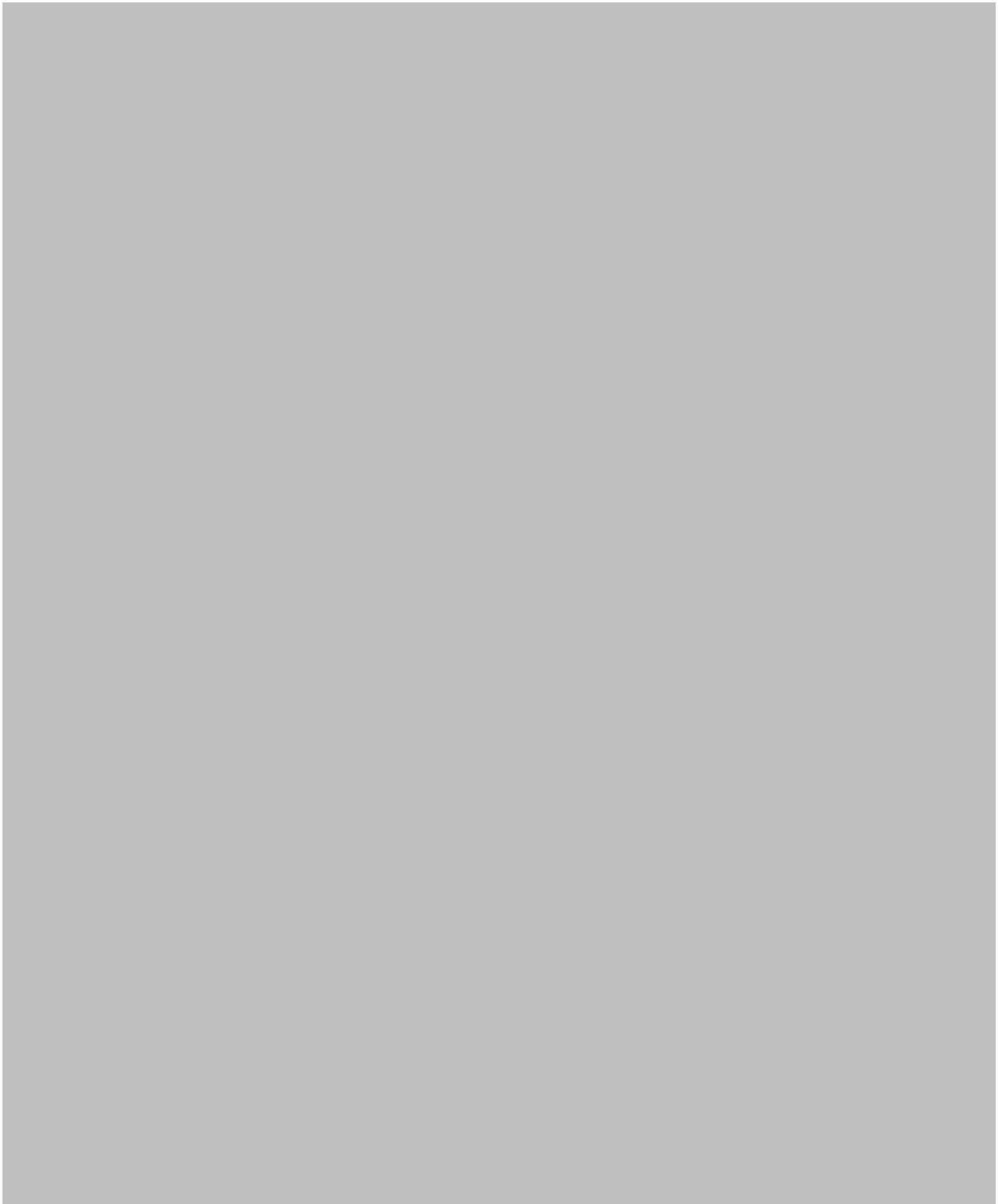


Figure 20: Gurmukhi alphabet.

I had applied for an adult education course, but that was cancelled for lack of support, so Devsi later gave me a course that he had prepared for health workers. I learned to transliterate the Gurmukhi script, but had difficulty distinguishing the Punjabi tonalities; even the few common phrases I learned

were not easily understood. I was grateful to those who spoke to me in English, and consoled by the difficulties Punjabi people have with the *Guru Granth Sahib Ji*, which has passages from a number of different languages ('it's really difficult, not just like "these" and "thous" in Shakespeare'), and by the preference of many younger British Punjabis for English ('they only hear Punjabi when their grandmothers are telling them off'), including a third who would prefer gurdwara worship to be in English (*British Sikh Report 2013*, 21).⁶² Other interfaith advisers have difficulty learning Punjabi, and British converts found it hard, even those who had married Punjabi Sikhs. There were to be no classes at GKN, the project drifted into abeyance.

ii) Being in orbit

Despite this people were talking freely with me, even beginning to discuss sensitive matters, but it was as a guest and a student I was finding my place –

It is something of a Copernican revolution as you place yourself in someone else's world. I feel I am held in planetary orbit, maintained at a correct distance by the gurdwara, correct for them as well as for me. It's not like if you go to church and you'll have someone trying to persuade you to go on the coffee rota or be confirmed or go to an Alpha class, there isn't an obvious progression, but neither is there any attempt to repel me, people are very friendly and welcoming. The expectation of the community seems to be that I will just stay as I am, but there is a bit of me that feels, from the point of view of the research and personally, 'is that it?'

In dialogue with Stobert I was challenged to push the boundaries –

⁶² British Sikhs described their Punjabi/Gurmukhi abilities as:
speaking: 50% very well, 35% well, 13% not well, 2% not at all;
listening 53% very well, 33% well, 6% not well, 2% not at all;
reading 16% very well; 22% well, 23% not well, 38% not at all;
writing 11% very well, 16% well, 31% not well, 42% not at all, demonstrating it is a stronger oral than written culture (*British Sikh Report 2014*, 22).

Sanghera, a second generation Punjabi from Wolverhampton, wrote: 'Punjabi, the language my parents speak [though his father could not read or write in it], is the one I learnt first. However I left home nearly twelve years ago and have since become less and less proficient in it, so much so that now, even asking for a glass of water sometimes has me burbling incoherently'... (Sanghera 2009, 21).

Stobert: Would it be costly or life-enhancing to knock that orbit a bit, if you ventured to get closer in or change the orbit? It's almost like action research, 'What would happen if...?'

This orbiting was not a serene progress, but one of contrasting pressures -

when it came to the putting away [after the washing up] I was the one who knew where things went with others turning to me, which was a nice feeling, being on home ground.

The secretary came in and I mucked up '*wahe guru ji ka kalsa*', '*wahe guru ji ki fateh*', which was embarrassing. I feel awkward with him at the moment.

My supervisor picked up on this -

It seemed to him quite a bumpy oscillation, between feeling really in at one moment and really out the next. I suggested an image of these being the gravitational forces that held me in position.

I found being marginal an enjoyable change from my central role in church life.

Whether I would have enjoyed it as much if my whole life had been marginalised

I did not know, though as retirement continues I will find out. In any case the stasis was illusory, in the coming months relationships would develop and change.

iii) Significance of the body

I noticed how much I appreciated *karah parshad*. I'm on a diet and this is the only sweet thing I have had all week except a bit of Christmas cake, two religiously related moments of sweetness in an otherwise bland week.

Mine was a corporeal model of engagement, as this and the pains of sitting cross-legged indicated. My body was shaping and being shaped, breaking down and building up (Miller-McLemore 2016, 23-44). As I shuttled back and forth, engaging in a regular learned physical pattern of entanglement, I experienced some of the vitality of physical interchange 'without which our species will starve, fade and eventually die out' (Chakrabarty 2017, 98).

iv) Similarities of belief

I am describing an experience rather than comparing beliefs,⁶³ but how I managed differences of belief is an aspect of my engagement. Similarities between Christianity and *Sikhi* as I experienced them were: the centrality of God's grace, with the *mool mantra* referring to it, and the ineffectuality of believers acting in their own wilfulness (*manmukh*) being a main theme of *Guru Granth Sahib Ji*. The loving relationship between God and follower is clearly there in both, though balanced in both by a sense of mystery and awe in the face of the divine. There are similarities in ethics: concern for the vulnerable, service to others, willing self-sacrifice, honesty and mutual support; and, for a Protestant, there was a recognisable strain of anti-religiosity in both religions. I was happy to recognise these similarities but never took them (as regularly invited to by Sikhs) as signs that both religions are at heart the same. They were signs of sufficient similarities to allow mutual comprehension, respect and enjoyment, but differences remained.

v) Differences of belief

The question of differences of belief takes different forms in the two faiths. For many Christians faith has to be in Jesus Christ and that faith is uniquely salvific so there is a clear benefit in converting to Christianity and a corresponding deficit in other faiths. Sikh believers recognise many possible pathways to release by the dissolution of the self and union with the One; it is absorbent of other faiths and rejects conversion. And yet there are ways in which the faiths are closer than those characterisations suggest. Christianity includes the liberal tradition which

⁶³ That has been done in Cole and Sambhi (1993).

casts doubt on whether Christian belief is a requirement of salvation;⁶⁴ whereas *Sikhi* has an understanding of the uniqueness and correctness of its message as against the futility of some Hindu and Muslim practices, and as worth defending against Christian missionary activity. Individuals may obtain salvation through any religion according to Sikhs, but the Gurus and *Sikhi* are regarded as uniquely effective in a common quest.

Against this background I felt challenged as to how I could believe two things at the same time, though when I interviewed people in mixed families who practised both religions that hardly seemed a sensible question. You just did, and then the so-called differences became insignificant, *lex oratio lex credo*, belief follows religious practice.⁶⁵

a) Reincarnation

A clear difference I had felt between Christianity and the Vedic religions was over reincarnation as contrasted with the individualism and uniqueness of resurrection, something that seemed to indicate a different imaginary about the very nature of existence. A convert from *Sikhi* to Christianity has described herself as being propelled by fear of reincarnation, but *Sikhi* is not itself tied to reincarnation, believing that constant recollection of God's grace breaks the cycle, *awagaun*, and liberation, *mukti*, is attained (Mehat with Wardell 1998, 15; Parry, 2016).

The pre-existence of the soul (and thus reincarnation) was anathematised by the Church at the Fifth Ecumenical Council in 553 as part of an ecclesiastical power struggle with followers of Origen (MacGregor 1982, 58). However many

⁶⁴ Universalist approaches are not just niche liberalism; 26 % of American Protestants are reported to take that view (Lifeway Research 2012).

⁶⁵ As true when the practice is exclusive as when it is multifarious.

Christian leaders have advocated reincarnation since, including Cardinal Mercier and Leslie Weatherhead, a renowned president of the British Methodist Conference (Lampe 2008, 54). I was particularly interested that Bishop Montefiore, who ordained me, was one such -

It can [...] be demonstrated that reincarnation is not only possible but probable, and that [...] far from creating obstacles to Christianity, it can even show benefits that are in keeping with the nature of God as revealed in Christ. (McGregor 2017, 10, quoting Montefiore)

He was also impressed by the evidence of people recalling their former lives (Montefiore 1990, 126-128). A significant minority of contemporary Christians (24% of American Christians, 28 % of British Christians) claim to believe in reincarnation (Pew Forum 2009; ComRes Global 2017, 7). Stringer recorded an Anglican church group in Manchester talking about prayers for the dead –

...one of those present happened to say that they liked the idea of reincarnation... practically everybody in the room, all of whom were regular church-goers, claimed that they also believed they would be reincarnated rather than go to heaven. (Stringer 2008, 38-39)

Nor is the disconnection between Sikhs and resurrection theology total. The poem *The Man Who Never Died*, written by a Sikh from within Sikh philosophy, demonstrates an interpretation of the Christian gospel that ‘may well be close to a very early [spiritual] Christian view of Christ’s resurrection’ (Singh G. 1989; 1 Peter 3:18; Parry 2009, 220, his italics). It was becoming harder to pin down the differences of belief between these two monotheistic faiths.

b) Conflicting loyalties

The main issue was not primarily about conflicting beliefs but about conflicting loyalties. As a Christian I acknowledge the exclusive claims of Jesus as presented by tradition and scripture ‘no-one comes to the Father except by me’, ‘there is no other name under heaven...’ but this was balanced by the

experience of invitation I had received in the gym and a more long-standing discomfort at the way that tradition is presented (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). I am similarly aware that *Sikhi*, despite its respect for other religions, draws on the tradition of gurudom, a unique relationship, and has in its history a demarcation from Hinduism that expects that Sikhs 'do not owe allegiance to any other religion' (Dharam Parchar Committee, 2014, 7). I would need to address this.

c) Conflicting loves

There is also a strong *Bhakti* element in *Sikhi*, a spirit of intense and intimate adoration, present in the hymns in *Guru Granth Sahib Ji* (Mandair 2014, 309). In one passage *Satguru* is compared with a bartender who makes the customer heady with liquor leading to bliss (*Sri Guru Granth Sahib English Translation* 1960, 328). I was familiar with the erotic trope in Christian theology, exemplified in Bernard's *Sermons on the Song of Songs* (Bernard of Clairvaux 1990). The erotic has a way of being fixated on one other person or even one aspect of them, and so does not lend itself well to two relationships (Fromm 2008, 50). In contrast, jealousy does not feature in *Sikhi*. A *Gurmukh* ⁶⁶ foreswears jealousy, and *Satguru* is not tainted by any such unwholesome emotion (*Sri Guru Granth Sahib English Version* 1960, 308, 1299). In Bernard's preaching of the crusades I had an example of the violent exclusivity to which such jealous love 'on God's behalf' could lead.⁶⁷ This should have no parallel in Sikh life, though zealotry is sometimes seen, mainly in inter-Sikh relations.

⁶⁶ One who is God-oriented, and has overcome his or her ego.

⁶⁷ Though the divine anger associated with jealousy is not real for all Christians, and jealousy is condemned in scripture as unspiritual (Llewelyn 1999, 11-13; Galatians 5: 19-20).

vi) Managing difference

a) Universalism

One way of dealing with these tensions is universalism, the claim that all faiths have a shared underlying truth. All religion including the doctrinal is symbolic and ‘using symbols from different religions can enrich our spiritual life,’ but to say that ‘religious symbols put us in touch with the divine so to speak’ has an essentialist tone (Goosen 2011, 113, 112). The problem with this (which Goosen, with his ‘so to speak’ seems to acknowledge) is the suggestion that one can identify behind different religions some common factor that is the true meaning of them all, a meaning inevitably cloudy. The reductive cost of this approach is very high; ‘each specific religious difference tells us the same sublimely simple dogma over and over again: the divine is a mystery’ (Heim 1995, 7).

b) Transcendentalism



Figure 21: Ikk Oan Kar, the symbol at the beginning of Sikh scripture, signifying ‘One Being Is.’

Another way of addressing this is to lose the whole notion of multiplicity in the transcendental, a significant element of Sikh philosophy and a way out of MRP twofold-ness. *Guru Granth Sahib Ji* begins with the words *Ikk Oan Kar*, ‘One Being Is.’⁶⁸ This oneness, the experience of reality as univocal, is only possible with the loss of the protective boundaries the ego puts in place, and its subject-object duality. Breaking these bounds orients the

⁶⁸ In the figure for *Ikk Oan Kar* the prime number 1 is to the left, then the first letter of the Sikh alphabet, the *á*, which is also a sign for *oan*, being, which is completed by the arc reaching away, signifying *kar*, is. (Singh, N.-G. K. 2011, 59).

ego towards the imperative that inhabits the self and all existence together, the *hukam*, order or command. The self says 'I am not,' not as self-annihilation but to disrupt the ego's confidence and so acknowledge the working of *hukam*. This oneness negates the inside/outside concept of self/God, leading to consummation not only with the divine but with all existing beings (Mandair, 2014, 302-310).

Shivnabh [...] asked [Nanak] whether he followed the Muslim or the Hindu way of life. Nanak's reply was 'The true guru has solved the problem of the two paths. He who meditates on One God and wavers not, shall understand.' (Sarna 2003, 86, quoting Raga Maru)

In the transcendental the issue of loyalty melts away: there is no 'self' making the choice between religions, something Goosen links to the kenotic example of Christ (Goosen 2011, 27-73). Nor are there two separate religions because such difference no longer has a place. I was sometimes aware in retrospect of losing myself in Sikh chanting and meditation, but, despite this and an attraction to the theosis⁶⁹ tradition of Orthodoxy I drew back from this unified state.

This hesitation formed a focal point in my guided reflection sessions. In riding the two horses of Christianity and *Sikhi* I hoped to breach the conceptual world, generating new energy. Stobert probed: 'I guess they will continue to be separate until you transcend them.'

I demurred: 'that is a strange thing to do to your guru.'

Stobert: 'Why wouldn't they want you to become your own person, a Guru or a Christ? When you see the Buddha (or Christ) coming towards you on the road, what must you do?'⁷⁰

⁶⁹ In which the end of the faithful (or of creation) is likeness to or unity with God.

⁷⁰ Koan attributed to Zen master Linji (Kopp 1972).

I recognised the cue and replied softly: 'Kill him.'

There was a moment of awe for both of us as the outcome of such an approach hung in the air, accepting that there is nothing 'behind' any religion, nor indeed human identity, with religious loyalty being aesthetic rather than substantial.

We explored this a number of times and it was exhilarating, but I was perturbed at the loss of relationship implied by this decision. I found I was still engaged with a Jesus 'out there', or a Guru. My personal relationship with Jesus had been reinvigorated by the vision, and I was developing an awareness of the personality of Guru Nanak that was leading me to seek a relationship with him as well. I asked how one could be in relationship with someone while losing identity, and Stobert replied 'It's not about losing identity. That would be demonic as opposed to life-enhancing. It's symbolic, metaphorical. That's a different thing.' He went on to say that 'we each have our outside-ness' but -

we sit lightly to the visage, because that's how we are able to be in dialogue, discourse, and we allow that identity and it allows for relationship, but nonetheless we are not stuck with it. There's also this element that we are Being, there is this form but at the same time I am also transparent to the transcendent. How else does one apprehend the transcendent other than through that visage?

Both *Sikhi* and guided reflection were challenging my tendency to make transcendence burdensome, replacing the question 'do I/does God exist?' with a liberating recognition of impermanence, of identity being something to bring into play in relation to that question rather than a pre-determining reality. It was also liberating to come to a different relationship with the divine, moving away from supplicant submission before an objectified, institutionalised god. I was realising that the process of creating or finding God continued throughout life, and that belief in God depended on whether the God representation at any point provided

relatedness and hope (Rizzuto 1981, 179, 202). I continued in relational mode, but freely and experimentally rather than in doctrine-induced anxiety.

c) Managing cognitive dissonance

By rejecting universalism and problematizing transcendentalism I was still faced with a conflict of beliefs and loyalties, but this was not as disconcerting as might be expected; even what seem contradictory religious impulses can live together in the heart (Jagessar 2009, 207).⁷¹ There has been sustained research on how people deal with their 'psychological representations,' logical, cultural or experiential, being inconsistent, the need for reduction of the dissonance, and how that is achieved (Festinger 1957, 14). Where it arises from a free decision (as my MRP does) the classical theory suggests changes of subsequent attitude can be expected to reduce the dissonance (Festinger 1957). However more recent research indicates that it is minimising the aversive consequences of the dissonance rather than the dissonance itself that is the key impetus for change, dissonance itself is acceptable (Cooper 2007, 82). There are aversive consequences for me in adopting two different belief systems: internal incoherence and being open to criticism from others, but there are also the attractions of holding novelty and familiarity together, and an enlarged social circle.

Further, a capacity to live with cognitive dissonance is required within any developed religious belief system. Christians are trained in this by the doctrine of the Trinity and the claim that Christ is fully God and fully human and yet of one nature; and research on religious attitudes in Birmingham showed that this was

⁷¹ Though not all theologians have found a multi-religious family setting conducive to this openness (cf. Strange 2014, 18f, 42).

not just a capacity of theological adepts, but that, for example, people held different views of the necessity of baptism depending on whether they are speaking generally or about their own family (Stringer 2008, 38). Sikhs hold contradiction together in the belief that God has attributes and at the same time that he does not, his presence in adoration and his utter transcendence, *nirgun sargun* (*Sri Guru Granth Sahib English Version 1960*, 102, 287). The opposites of imminence and transcendence are maintained in relationship in both Christianity and *Sikhi*, and that is a more radical dissonance than anything between the faiths.

C) Findings at this stage

i) Friendship part of method.

I was made starkly aware that permission was dependent on friendship; the same interreligious friendship characterised as insufficiently theologically rigorous at the start of my research had proved to be its saviour. Friendship also meant I could not cavil over recognising Methodist ordination, reshaping my attitude towards my own.

ii) Bodily engagement is significant

The bodily aspect of engagement provided coherence, signifying I was the same person at both places of worship despite experimenting with different identities and beliefs. The same body engaged with people and sensations at both, carried out learned performances at both, and moved between the places of worship, knitting the two experiences together and opening each up to the other.

iii) Differences of belief remain

Despite the encouragement of Sikh friends I could not say differences of belief were insignificant as in the universalist position, nor adopt the dismissal of

difference itself in line with transcendentalists, but the key difference is not philosophical but one of loyalty.

iv) Differences of belief can be lived with

This was surprisingly easy, bearing out that cognitive dissonance is not necessarily a problem unless there are other aversive consequences. Acceptance of such dissonance is required within religious systems as well as between them.

6. CHALLENGES TO BELONGING

A) Fieldwork

i) *Regret*

Early Easter morning, attending the gurdwara before church, I sat in the car listening to a reflection on the radio: 'Why are you looking for the living among the dead?' and I felt chastened, adrift, but the mood did change when I went in –

The sun was coming in through the windows and the white robes of the *granthi* were hanging on the coat stand. It reminded me of the light from the empty tomb and the Easter garments hanging on the cross. There was a bed at the back, I guess for those taking shifts on reading through the *Guru Granth Sahib* [J]. It was white, folded back, like grave-clothes.

Regret sometimes struck me while in church -

I was talking about the work of the Holy Spirit and found I was speaking with conviction, and then felt sad. It was sadness at what I was leaving behind and I suddenly thought 'why am I mucking this all around?' Anyway the feeling didn't last long, it was a sunny day.'

I had lurking at the back of my mind the feeling that there was something faithless about what I was doing with *Sikhi*, but when I thought about it later I couldn't really earth where that guilt was coming from.

In July 2016 I preached about finding our true identity in Christ but reflected 'how does that tie in with my engagement (and confusion?) with *Sikhi*?' This was the last reference to this type of anxiety, suggesting that for the final year this was resolved or suppressed as the new practice became established.

ii) *Family*

Some difficulties I faced were practical. I was not trying to lead the life of an *Amritdhari*, and so did not become vegetarian⁷² or teetotal, as only 27% of Sikhs are the former and 37% the latter, but I did cease eating beef throughout my

⁷² It was only when Devsi corrected this that I realised *Amritdhari* need not be vegetarian, although all food in the gurdwara is vegetarian.

fieldwork, along with 56% of Sikhs, something that needed explaining to friends and family (*British Sikh Report 2014*, 28).⁷³ It was generally kindly received, but sometimes with a sense that I was being eccentric. I was upset when a family member asked whether I was still a Christian, but we talked about it, and she reassured me she was confident I was, 'but a bit different because I'm not judgemental'. Taking *langar* meant that I was not able to appreciate Sunday lunch, which broke with what had been a centrepiece of domestic life: 'in prioritising my social contact at the gurdwara I am breaking a social contact with [my wife].' Being at the gurdwara also made me late for occasions with the wider family, birthdays and the like, which are often celebrated by a meal out. They were accepting but I was having to apologise for the consequences of my engagement with *Sikhi*.

iii) Turban

I wore a headscarf in the gurdwara and at *seva*, but continued as normal elsewhere. At the first gurdwara I was sorting through the headscarves provided when someone offered to tie a turban on me, but there were no suitable cloths available. I was touched by this friendly gesture, but wondered what people in the gurdwara would have thought, and then what it would have been like to wear it throughout the day. I found later that the practice of putting on a turban just to go to the gurdwara was disparaged among Sikhs ('like wearing a hat'), and wearing it continually would have been insensitive in my Christian ministry, especially when dealing with occasional contacts. However, when I attended an anniversary celebration of Sikh bus drivers being allowed to wear turbans at work

⁷³ My interfaith duties precluded my avoiding halal meat, as do 44% of British Sikh meat-eaters (*British Sikh Report 2014*, 28).

there was an invitation to non-Sikhs to wear turbans as signs of solidarity. A couple of Sikh friends offered to tie a turban on me and I accepted. With their support I decided to wear it for the rest of a busy day, round Wolverhampton, in a Hindu temple, and on Birmingham university campus. I was aware of the discrimination against the turban we had been hearing about at the celebration, but it aroused little reaction, even combined with a clerical collar. Only my supervisor showed any unease. Before I explained the background he was worried that I was taking an over-dramatic stance to force the pace of events. Some photographs were taken after it had been put on, and I entered one for an 'images of research' exhibition at the university. It aroused interest, and was enquired after as an image for an anti-discrimination campaign on campus, though not used. At the exhibition launch a student from Jordan said no such experimentation could be considered in her country where religious identity was



Figure 22: The author.

marked on all government paperwork and maintained by rigid social structures. The picture was later used on the front page of the diocesan website, suggesting the ease with which the diocese accepted my explorations (Diocese of Lichfield 2017).

The day of wearing a turban felt like dressing up, raising the issue of pretence. There was no deception of others intended or likely, but was

there self-delusion? I was aware of a sense of playfulness, shared with those who had put the turban on me, and wondered if that was inappropriate in view of its significance. This was an accusation that could be levelled at my whole Sikh experience, and how accurate it was would depend on how things progressed.

iv) Alcohol and Communion

At Beacon church I had communicated with both Anglican wine that included alcohol and Methodist non-alcoholic wine, marking my participation in both denominations. However it was taboo to attend the gurdwara after taking alcohol and, although it was unlikely to be detected, I was uneasy that I was abusing their hospitality and not preparing myself spiritually. It was an easy change to make, unnoticed I think in church, to take just the non-alcoholic wine, but when I mentioned it to Stobert he questioned me. I had received Anglican Communion since I was thirteen, and now I was throwing that over without much thought, adapting my Christian practice to meet Sikh requirements, but not the other way round. I was stimulated by this challenge, but rejected it. I was happy to take Communion without alcohol whenever I was on circuit, and had long been moved by the description of Bishop Wilson giving a Communion of rice while interned in Singapore (Hayter and Bennitt c.1947).⁷⁴ As to the wider point, with Christianity being my base it was inevitably my Christian practice that would change. There were plenty of examples (e.g. not wearing a turban) of Sikh practice being moderated in deference to my Christianity. But I had made the change without much thought, and needed to have this pointed out.

⁷⁴ Alongside this goes my bafflement at the pastoral insensitivity of the Catholic declaration that gluten-free wafers cannot be used (*Independent* 2017).

v) Professional challenge

I had requested a discussion about my research with a group of Anglican clergy to which I belonged, provoking correspondence between members as to whether it was appropriate for discussion at all. The chair decided to proceed, the meeting was friendly and attentive, and the conversation was sometimes supportive, sometimes neutrally questioning. There was just one barbed question: 'does the Bishop know you are doing this?' to which the answer was 'yes,' but there was also anxiety –

I struggle that a Christian minister could in any way participate in the worship of another faith without undermining their loyalty to Christ. I understand your reasons for wanting to enter their world but I struggle because of what Christ means to you, and the impact of it on you spiritually. My concern is a pastoral one for your safety spiritually...

This followed an example of spiritual danger from engaging with the occult. I did not have an answer as to how the experience might affect my relationship with Jesus, but referred to the constant need for discernment in interreligious, Christian, and secular settings alike. Throughout my research this was the meeting in which I was most clearly challenged, but it was done in friendship. It sharpened my awareness that there were issues of loyalty and betrayal that I had not fully worked out and would need to address.

vi) Academic challenge

A colleague suggested I needed to relate to the challenge of writers who opposed MRP, referring to Strange, who held that non-Christian religions were 'human idolatrous responses to divine revelation behind which stand deceiving demonic forces,' a view which related to the discussion of the occult in my meeting with colleagues (Strange 2014, 41). This might have suggested that Christians should not engage with other religions, but Strange called on Evangelicals to immerse

themselves in the lives of the religious other, recognising the power of God's grace to subversively fulfil the other religion (Strange 2014, 336). My position is that it is only when one attempts such immersion that one finds out how Christian grace operates in that situation ('the Spirit blows where it wills,' John 3:8), while recognising that subversive fulfilment may be one outcome. A sign of the cause of divergence between our views was found among his theoretical examples of this subversive fulfilment, where the contrast was drawn between the determinism of other faiths and the dialogical character of Christian vocation (Strange 2014, 272-273). Apart from the stereotyping of Christian and other-religion views (Ephesians 1:3-14 sounds determinist, the reading of the daily *hukamnama* seems dialogical) this offered an either/or polarity over exactly the sort of issue, similar to determinism/free will, where an understanding of the work of an omniscient creator who is also a liberator requires a degree of cognitive dissonance rather than an absolute choice. Another sign of our different approaches was that Strange described his Christian/Hindu family background, but then gave no indication of how his theoretical position related to that background, nor was there any other indication of how the complexities of lived experience related to the doctrinal absolutes described (Strange 2014, 18).⁷⁵

vii) Response to a crisis

Much more personally significant than these challenges was a crisis that came on our family in August 2016. My daughter and her husband Peter⁷⁶ had just announced they were expecting their first child when Peter, who had been finding

⁷⁵ Being raised in the multi-religious setting of Guyana has led Strange and Jagessar in opposite directions over interreligious relations, but neither reflects on why. It is presented as not relevant by Strange, obviously formative by Jagessar (2009, 207).

⁷⁶ Not his real name.

walking increasingly difficult, was diagnosed as having a tumour that was damaging his spinal cord. Surgery was risky, but without it there was the likelihood of extensive paralysis, even death, and suddenly the need to pray was urgent.

I had just interviewed a convert from *Sikhi* to Christianity who had experienced a number of healings, some at a large evangelical and charismatic church the other side of Birmingham. This church has midweek prayers for healing and I attended them for three weeks until Peter's surgery. One of his work colleagues was a regular attender and had, unknown to me, brought him a prayed-over handkerchief from there as a blessing, a coincidence that later helped me feel I had been right to be there. I appreciate charismatic Christians for their awareness of experience as important to faith, but this was also a time of submission. The hundreds of people there felt like a reprimand to my ministry to small congregations, and the preaching included condemnation of same-sex relationships and scathing comments on multiculturalism, with both of which I was ill at ease. The prayers for healing involved standing at the front of church with scores of others while a general prayer was said, giving me the Naaman-like thought 'is this it?' (2 Kings 5:11-13). I participated as much as I could, now driven not by the excitement of exploration but by urgent need. My wife and I also asked for prayer at church, and we prayed together at home. I was so chastened by the experience that I did not ask for prayer at the gurdwara at first in case I offended the Christian God. When I did eventually ask a Punjabi prayer was crafted and offered, and regular enquiries about Peter's health followed, continuing throughout the fieldwork. I was advised at the gurdwara to pray to

Jesus as well as praying there, and reflected on how unlikely it was that any Christian would give parallel advice to someone from a Sikh background.

Peter's operation was successful. The rediscovered harmony of Christian and Sikh prayer after the tearing apart of my first response seemed to mirror the healing the family shared in as Peter gradually recovered.

This experience related to my research. First, confidence in the rightness of my MRP, apparently relaxed when tested by clergy colleagues, melted away when faced with a personal crisis; I clung to my Christian roots and instinctively turned away from *Sikhi*. Second, my espoused understanding was of God as gentle and kind, exercising a chosen weakness which is nonetheless universally significant, arising from a kenotic divine choice (c.f. Caputo 2006). In contrast my operative theology had been revealed as that of a powerful God willing and able to command the smallest details of life (the tumour was the size of a blueberry), but also capricious and vengeful, who might be teaching me a lesson and need assuaging (Cameron *et al.* 2010, 2836). I was not just dealing with a contrast between two internal theological positions, liberal Christianity and *Sikhi*, but at least one other with this interventionist God, and possibly legion, only to be revealed as circumstances changed. Was this what I really believed underneath the sophisticated gloss I was presenting? But must I accept my thralldom to a view of God – and life – that was activated under such stress? This question seems unanswerable, but my response was not so much one of conservative Christianity, more the animism Stringer presents as the elementary form of English religious life (Stringer 2008, 105). It recalled Pattison's definition of spirituality as 'the experience and process of engaging with and managing significant relations and attachments,' a wide and raw thing of which religion is

only one aspect (Pattison 2010, 353). I experienced the frailty of my own religious identity, although both religious institutions supported me without the friction which can be experienced in MRP at times of distress (Moyaert 2011; Topolski 2015).

There was a sad postscript to this story when Peter's devout young colleague suddenly and unexpectedly died some months later. Had God somehow taken her life as a love offering in return for Peter's health and the wellbeing of his family? That is neither a Christian nor a Sikh view, but rather another example of a more instinctive religious response to events.

viii) Temptations to move

A more contained challenge to my engagement came from temptations to move to other non-Christian bases partway through my research. On one early-morning visit to GKN there was an enthusiastic visitor there who invited me to go to another gurdwara with a *granthi* who spoke good English, and I visited a couple of times. It was nearer home, the *granthi* was friendly, a Punjabi convert from Christianity, and the teaching included English passages ('whoso remembers me lovingly, his insides start singing'). I was told decisions were made by the whole congregation together 'on the principle of love,' which had a Quaker-like attractiveness. On the other hand the main time of worship was 5-00 a.m., and they were followers of a Canadian education programme, *Gobind Sarvar*, the standing of which in the Sikh community I could not judge.

The other temptation concerned *Ek Niwas* temple in Wolverhampton. The priest, another Punjabi, had had a vision from God calling all religions together and had established a temple which included *Guru Granth Sahib Ji* alongside images of many religions and beliefs, including the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Buddha, a

first nation American, Neptune, and a wizard. Sikhs attempted to get it shut down, objecting to *Guru Granth Sahib Ji* being kept in such company. The scriptures were removed, though the empty throne is still there as are images of the gurus, and some hostility remains (BBC 2006). I went there as part of my interfaith work, a visit that itself led to Sikh complaint. As I was going round this interreligious setting established in the face of opposition I felt some of its attraction, and sympathy for those involved,⁷⁷ but I did not transfer. My project was not headed towards this homogeneous blending, I could not accept the message of the temple that all religions were essentially one, and I would have exchanged relating to two major world faiths, Christianity and *Sikhi*, for relating to a small sect rejected by both.

The deciding factor in both cases was that I had a loyalty to GKN gurdwara, to people with whom bonds of friendship were developing, now being reinforced by habit.

ix) Converts

I was surprised that there was no challenge from the converts interviewed (in both directions), who I expected to be the most clear on the need to make a choice. Their eventual decisions – for all of them it took time⁷⁸ – had been life-changing responses to experience, arising from healing, answered prayer, community engagement, visions or spiritual awakenings. Even years later they

⁷⁷ I was also touched by the priest's description of a visitation of Jesus when the priest's car broke down on the way to Leeds. Jesus told him to go to the German war cemetery in Cannock but he objected that his own guru had told him to go to Leeds. Jesus smiled and said 'start the car then!' but the car would not go. Jesus left but the priest's own guru appeared and told him to do as Jesus had said. The car then started and he went to the cemetery where he was told to pray for the release of the souls of those buried there, souls he saw rise from their graves and go free.

⁷⁸ A normal pattern (Rambo 1999, 5).

were digesting and awed by these experiences, and so willing to accommodate my own exploration of what God was doing with me.

B) Qualifiers of my belonging

i) Sexuality

Other aspects of my identity affected the mode rather than the degree of my belonging. I was presenting as straight, and so did not have to negotiate negative perceptions of gay identity. Although these issues are not formalised in *Guru Granth Sahib Ji* or in Sikh rules of lifestyle, and some Sikhs take a liberal attitude, many Sikhs agree with wider Indian culture in regarding gay orientations negatively (Jhutti-Johal 2011, 79-81).⁷⁹ This is not to say my straight approach was all gain, as a gay standpoint could alter a researcher's perspective to advantage. Alison described his framework of perception as a gay Catholic as exploring 'the shape of a new story that starts to emerge where there is a rupture in impossibility,' and Voss Roberts made a specific parallel between gay experience and MRB (Alison 2003, xi; Voss Roberts 2016).

ii) Gender

A woman researcher would have had a very different pattern of access. Men and women sit separately in *darbar* and tend to separate in the *langar* hall, and women have their own midweek meeting. I remember a discussion between men when a nearby woman muttered 'bloody politics!' hinting at a perspective on this male-dominated community about which a woman researcher would have discovered much more. A feminist approach would also have led to quite different questions or

⁷⁹ 36% of British Asians find same-sex relationships unacceptable, as against 15% of the wider population (BBC 2018).

structural approaches to belonging (Davies 2008, 49).⁸⁰ I had to recall that this was not an ethnographic study of the gurdwara itself, but an account of my own participation, with all the specificity that entailed.



Figure 23: Display at GKN Gurdwara, 27 November 2016.

A tradition of gender equality in *Sikhi* goes back to Guru Nanak, standing out in Indian history and centuries ahead of Western culture, and the memories of powerful women like Mai Bhago are celebrated.⁸¹ A woman, Bibi Jagbir Kaur, was twice elected president of the Sikh management organisation, the SGPC;⁸² and Sophia Duleep Singh was a notable figure in the British Suffragette movement (*Hindustan Times* 2012; *Guardian* 2015). Sikh women are recognised as including many high achieving professionals,⁸³ but patriarchal attitudes are still found. Domestic abuse is present among Sikhs as in all communities, sometimes exacerbated by

the tensions of *izzat*,⁸⁴ and it was good to see it being acknowledged by a presentation in the gurdwara (Sanghera 2007, Sanghera 2009, 42, Puri 2007, Sikh

⁸⁰ Recognising that researchers of any gender can – but do not have to – engage a feminist approach.

⁸¹ She and the other wives led their deserter husbands back to a battle against terrible odds at Khidrana (Jhutti-Johal 2011, 38-39).

⁸² *Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak* Committee, which manages gurdwaras in Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and Chandigarh, and administers *Harmandir Sahib*.

⁸³ 45% of British Sikh women are graduates and 23% have a post-graduate qualification, slightly more than among their male counterparts at 44% and 22% respectively (*British Sikh Report 2017*, 26).

⁸⁴ Honour, family or individual prestige.

Helpline 2017). Women were only allowed to serve on GKN's committee after the threat of appeals to anti-discrimination tribunals and the Sikh governing court, the *Akal Takht*. I was not aware of women being on the committee while I was there, nor is it usual elsewhere, though women have taken the lead in British gurdwaras when male leadership has proved chaotic (Jhutti-Johal 2011, 47). In GKN gurdwara the washing up, in theory an opportunity for anyone to offer seva, is largely done by women. Men help serve food but rarely prepare it.

Other reflections on gender are more personal, a reminder that mine is a 'male gaze' (Mulvey 1975) -

I noticed a young woman with a dress the colour of sunlight stood close to the front. Straight away she turned round as though knowing someone was looking at her. I hastily looked away so don't know whether she looked in my direction or not, but felt embarrassed, caught out.

I seldom approached any younger women and noted that they did not approach me or get introduced to me. The two exceptions were a white wife of a Punjabi who I approached about interviewing her and her husband who was present but talking with someone else, but from whom I never heard back; and the woman starting children's classes in Punjabi. When the classes did not emerge I asked an older woman about it and she said the prospective teacher would let me know. I had a message back saying it was not happening, but we never spoke directly. Older women, however, greeted me with as much friendship and kindness as the men -

When I started washing up in the kitchen I was told I could get some flip-flops from outside, but before I could do so one of the women slipped her large slippers off and gave them to me. Nice and warm!

I contrasted my experience as a male in the gurdwara with my failure to factor that into my understanding of the Church. My awareness of women's experiences in ministry developed as I trained two women curates, but only more

recently have I have recognised my experience of the Church is not standard but gendered, 'malestream' rather than mainstream (Coffey 1999, 13). Lay leadership by women has increased, as much through the numerical majority of women over men as through any ideological change,⁸⁵ but I remain insufficiently alert to stereotyping of roles. Men helped with food preparation or washing up no more in Beacon Church than in the gurdwara.

C) Findings at this stage

i) On the edge of pretending

Wearing the turban raised the question of play-acting with regard to the whole project, an anxiety not resolved quickly. There was also an element of playful enjoyment for myself and for some Sikh friends.

ii) Even modest engagement makes demands

I had pitched my degree of engagement at a modest level that was compatible with my ministry and would be for other DIFAs. Even that caused some disturbance of domestic and church arrangements.

iii) The anxiety of others

Some colleagues exhibited an anxiety for me as an individual, more than as regards my role, an anxiety that mirrored that shown in the process of seeking ethical approval.

iv) Blindness to issues

I had not appreciated the issue over changing my communion practice, and there were other issues I would be slow to attend to, showing the value of guided reflection.

⁸⁵ 3 women for every 2 men in the UK (Pew Forum 2016), twice as many women as men at Beacon Church.

v) Circumstances change belief

I had revealed under stress a very different frame of religious interpretation to that I espoused, and other latent religious identities could be revealed or generated by circumstances. I was not dealing with a simple Christian/Sikh internal dialogue.

7. COMMUNITY IDENTITY

As my place in the gurdwara as guest and student became settled and as I rode various challenges that had arisen, I explored the wider Sikh context to better understand the relationship in which I was engaged. This was an emotional as well as theoretical exploration, I had skin in the game as I investigated religious and other aspects of the complex nature of Sikh identity (Sian 2013, 13).

A) *Sikhi* as a faith identity

i) Institutions

Guru Nanak only referred to *Sikhi* once, where a 'Sikh' is taken to mean one having instruction, guided by teaching, a student, leading Devsi and others to say that I was already a Sikh in that regard (Devsi 2010, 3; Takhar 2016, 5-6). However 'Who is a Sikh?' is not just a religious issue⁸⁶ but also concerns a secular ethical tradition, ethnic identity, issues of caste and of sects, complex relationships with Hindus and Muslims, imperialist meddling, orientalist distortions, a bloodstained engagement with the Indian state, a homeland that spreads across the Indo-Pakistan border, and the complexities of the diaspora: '...basic disagreements persist and the indisputable answer still seems to elude us' (McLeod 1989, 99).

Three institutions offer the illusion of order, *the Khalsa*, the *Akal Takht*, and the *Rehat Maryada*. The *Khalsa* is composed of those men and women who have undergone *amrit*, in which Sikhs commit themselves to the 5 Ks (*kesh*, uncut hair, *karah*, a steel bracelet, *kanga*, a wooden comb, *kaccha* - or *kachh* or *kachera* - ,

⁸⁶ 'The fifth largest' religion is often quoted though contested. The area of dispute bears out the problem of seeing religions as integrated, mutually recognised units. Is 'folk religion' a single religion? Is Daoism a religion or a philosophy of life? What about religions that 'allow their followers to mix and match with other religions' (Sikhsangat, 2017)?

cotton underwear, and *kirpan*, steel knife).⁸⁷ They make commitments to eschew alcohol and to regular prayer, including daily prayer before dawn. Many turban-wearing and otherwise observant Sikhs leave this stage until old age or never enter it at all; Devsi was seventeen years in preparation. *Amritdhari* Sikhs are sometimes presented as typical, but are a minority (Kalsi 2007, 98; Cole 2003, 43). GKN has around the overall national figure of 10 %, respected but with no specific role in the management of the gurdwara (*British Sikh Report 2017*, 20).⁸⁸ *Amrit's* demands result in the recognised category of *patit*, the lapsed, and in punishable breaches of discipline, *tankah* (Cole 2003, 201-202). *Amritdhari* should not be regarded as the apogee of *Sikhi*, there is no conversion rite to becoming a Sikh, and the main characteristic of *Sikhi* is following *bani*, Sikh teachings leading to 'harmony with others as a result of union with the divine' including non-discrimination, tolerance, hard work, and sharing income and spending time with needy people (Takhar 2018; 2016a, 169).

The *Akal Takht*, the seat of judicial authority at the *Harminder Sahib*, the Golden Temple, represents the authority of five leading gurdwaras over world-wide *Sikhi*, though the standing of the head of the court, its *Jathedar*, has been a matter of dispute (Dilgeer 1995).⁸⁹ It issues practical instructions of sometimes surprising detail, such as an edict saying no more gurdwaras are to be built in Wolverhampton and the money spent instead on education and health care.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Many other Sikhs wear some of these or wear them on occasion.

⁸⁸ This includes 35% of over 65s, inferring that the proportion is less among Sikhs below that age.

⁸⁹ As has the role of the SGPC, the *Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak* Committee, which makes the appointments.

⁹⁰ As I was told by the president of a large gurdwara in the city.

The *Rehat* (or *Reht*) *Maryada*, a rulebook which dates from 1945, includes a definition of who is a Sikh. This goes beyond *Amritdhari*, but has belief in *amrit* as a required characteristic. It forbids Sikhs to ‘owe allegiance to any other religion’⁹¹ (Dharam Parchar Committee 2014, 7). The importance of this to me is clear, though the standing of the *Rehat Maryada* is greater in theory than practice. Despite a Sikh upbringing Takhar first came across it as an undergraduate, and reckons most diaspora-born Sikhs are unaware of it; and a visitor to a large and well organised gurdwara told me a copy could not be found on the premises (Takhar 2016, 1, 183). When its authority is cited, e.g. over mixed marriages, Sikh opponents of its more conservative stance dismiss it (Dhaliwal, 2016).

Beside the *Amritdhari* Sikhs the *Rehat Maryada* also recognises *Sahajdhari* Sikhs, ‘slow adopters,’ a term criticised by Cole as ‘incorrect and insensitive,’ which idealises the *Khalsa* by seeing all Sikhs as aspiring towards it⁹² (Cole 2003, 43). *Sahajdhari* Sikhs are further grouped by some as *Keshdhari*, those with turbans and uncut hair, and *mona*, clean-shaven and without turbans.⁹³ Those who were early followers of Guru Nanak but not clearly distinguished from the wider Hindu culture around them were known as *Nanak panthi*, a term still used as an epithet for such sects as the *Nirankaris* who reject the *Khalsa* form (Takhar 2014, 354). The issue was to clarify whether any of these descriptions – clearly not *Amritdhari* - could be appropriate for me.

⁹¹ Something foreshadowed by the British definition of Sikhs in the Gurdwaras Act 1925 (Takhar 2016, 24).

⁹² I have come across several *Sahajdhari* Sikhs who have expressed the desire to take *amrit* when they are elderly and away from the constraints of earning a living. The greater proportion of over 65 *Amritdhari* (35 % against 10 % overall) may reflect that rather than generational change (*British Sikh Report 2017*, 20).

⁹³ Cole commented ‘it would probably be unwise for non-Sikhs to use [this term]’ (Cole 2003, 43).

ii) Distinction from Hinduism

Like many religions *Sikhi* has been formed in relation to others, a relationship in continuous flux. McLeod proposed that the loose identification of *Nanak panthi* as a group within wider Hindu society was overlaid by the establishment of the *Khalsa* in 1699, which he characterised as having a martial approach associated with *Jats*, and then by the law and administration of the British raj (McLeod 1989, 28, 90-93). Oberoi used Sikh historical materials to show that complex religious identities including what would now be thought of as MRP were commonplace within *Sikhi* long after the establishment of the *Khalsa* (Oberoi 1994, 201-203, 253-257). He claimed that new communication methods and internal Sikh politics at the end of the nineteenth century (the rise of the *Tat Khalsa* movement), were the underlying factors in establishing a clear Sikh identity rather than a specific colonialist influence (Oberoi 376, 416-417). This identity did however become codified by the British administration, political and military, and strengthened by confrontations with Christian missionaries and reformed Hinduism (Oberoi 1994, 222-223, 362-376). However this presentation of *Sikhi* as a late construct has itself been widely rejected, with claims that since the time of the second guru Sikhs were a distinct community for which Guru Nanak had himself put down the markers (Singh, P. 2014, 29; Singh H. 2014, 206). Punjabi Sikhs may engage in some Hindu practices⁹⁴ or other folk-religious activity, but the distinctiveness that contrasts with this has consequences for anyone wishing to engage with *Sikhi* in MRP -

For Bhai Gurdas (1551-1636) a person with multiplicity of religious alliances is like a prostitute who goes around doing everything and pleasing everyone. (Singh H. 2014, 208)

⁹⁴ A number of turbaned Sikhs attend Wolverhampton mandir for Divali, and I have seen attenders at GKN gurdwara wearing the Hindu thread *jenoi* alongside their *kara*.

iii) Sikh relationship with Christianity

The contacts between *Sikhi* and Christianity are comparatively recent,⁹⁵ with Parry tracing the Christian mission in the Punjab back to 1833 (Parry 2009, 1, 11). Reaction to this missionary effort led to the formation of *Singh Sabha* to improve Sikh education and protect a sense of Sikh identity (Parry 2009, 123). Relations between Sikhs and Christians varied between the positive and respectful,⁹⁶ and the confrontational and dismissive.⁹⁷ There were also those such as Pandit Waljit Bhai and Tahil Singh who refused to regard them as 'other' to each other, but their irenic approach did not survive the contest of communities (Parry 2009, 46).⁹⁸ The missionaries' change of focus in favour of the *dalits*, and then the souring of mood following the attack on *Harmandir Sahib* in 1984, halted dialogue and in India it has never recovered (Parry 2009, 66).

In the UK 1984 saw the establishment of the United Reformed Church Sikh/Christian consultation and in 1993 *Sikhism and Christianity: A Comparative Study* was published, discussing the nature of grace and of incarnation and the meaning of 'kingdom,' but latterly engagement has been intermittent⁹⁹ (Parry 2009, 94; Cole and Sambhi, 1993). Lambert has investigated what Christians can learn from their encounter with Sikhs, and some scriptural reasoning now

⁹⁵ Although there is a tradition of Guru Nanak going to the Vatican to argue against slavery (*Sikhnet* 2014).

⁹⁶ Exemplified by Loehlin, a Presbyterian missionary who was invited to speak at *Harmandir Sahib*, and Gopal Singh, a Sikh who wrote *The Man Who Never Died*, a devotional poem about Jesus Christ (Singh G. 1989).

⁹⁷ Such as the abusive missionary Trumpp, or the tract-writer Bhai Vir Singh (Parry 2009, 27, 59, 130, 162)

⁹⁸ Though it is echoed by *Yeshu Satsang*, groups of Christian converts consciously retaining Sikh or Hindu social structures (Vu 2012).

⁹⁹ Though Parry does currently lead a small group of Christians in the study of *Guru Granth Sahib Ji*.

includes consideration of the *Guru Granth Sahib Ji* beside the Bible and the Qur'an (Lambert 2001; Scriptural Reasoning 2017).



Figure 24: Mann Jitt Weekly, Christmas 2016.

The ambivalence in the relationship between Sikhs and Christians was exemplified at GKN in Christmas 2016, when the Punjabi newspaper distributed there, *Mann Jitt Weekly*, included several Christmas greetings with illustrations of the Sacred Heart, some alongside pictures of the martyrdom of Guru Gobind Singh's sons, marked at the same time (*Mann Jitt Weekly* 2016).

In contrast to those signs of togetherness was a pile of pamphlets warning Sikhs not to get involved in Christmas celebrations as they were satanic. No-one at the gurdwara knew who had put them there, but they demonstrated a defensiveness also found on the internet in the face of Christianity (e.g. Singh, I. J. 2008).

Sikhs dislike the idea of conversion, remembering bloody forced conversions by Muslims and the ties of Christian missions with imperialism. *Sikhi's* universalism sees changing religion as lacking ultimate significance and resisting the preordained *karma* for that lifetime. This was problematic for some in relating to my project. 'We do not seek converts' was not far from implied criticism of my attempt to flex religious identity. In turn I am uneasy about the rejection of conversion, the opportunity for which is from my perspective an aspect of religious freedom.

iv) Sikh relationship with Islam

I have a concern for interfaith relations generally, so how *Sikhi* relates to faiths other than Christianity is important to me. When I started attending GKN one of the musicians was a Muslim and this was a matter of satisfaction as his presence recalled Mardana, Guru Nanak's Muslim musician and companion. There were regular reminders that religions should not divide people following Guru Nanak's founding declaration 'there is no Hindu, there is no Muslim' and the wider Vedic philosophy that religion is a matter of birth, of *karma*, rather than conversion (Dhillon 2012, 64). However tensions with Muslims, historic and current, recurred in conversation. My reaction is complex; for example I am unsure about the regular accusations of Muslim attempts to convert Sikh women. Research has not substantiated it, and so I am neither willing to take it into my world view nor able to challenge it (Singh, G. 2010, 35-36; Sian 2013). I had to ask whether identifying with *Sikhi* entails taking on some of the wariness, self-justifications and hostilities that have arisen from their history. This must be a matter of degree for me as it is for established Sikhs who in conversation place themselves at very different places on this spectrum of suspicion.

v) Secular Sikhi

An appealing aspect of *Sikhi's* view of other religions is its tradition of secularism, and defence of religious freedom. Guru Teg Bahadur suffered torture and martyrdom to prevent Hindus being forcibly converted to Islam, and this tolerance was present in the Sikh empire established in the eighteenth century, which had Persians, Hindus and a Frenchman in the government.¹⁰⁰ Sikhs have sometimes

¹⁰⁰ As explained to me by Devsi. The internationalism of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's military advisers is described by Singh, P. and Rai (2012, 126 - 128).

been caught up in communal violence but there is no record of attempts at forced conversion, something of which Sikhs can be justly proud, and which shows up a contrasting Christian history. The Sikh secular tradition offers a principled separation of religion and state that in its libertarian fundamentals is impressive, and, to a member of an established church, challenging (Juss 2010).

B) Sikhi as a nationality



Figure 25: showing the scattered provenance of the Panji Pyare.

Guru Nakak had followers in many parts of India and beyond, and the original *Khalsa*, the *Panji Pyari*, came from all over the Indian sub-continent. However, largely in the face of the Mughal threat, there developed a number of states with Sikh rulers, including Ranjit Singh's empire (1799-1839) (Singh, S.

2014, 62-65). Sikhs identify with the

Punjab, an area much greater than the modern state, split at partition between Pakistan and India.¹⁰¹ The violent response of the Indian government to Punjabi separatism, in particular the assault on *Harminder Sahib* in 1984 and the massacre of Sikhs across India following Indira Ghandi's murder, focussed this nationalist feeling.

Among Sikh nationalists struggling for Khalistan, 'the Country of the Pure', recent evidence of British complicity in the attack on *Harminder Sahib* has caused resentment (Singh P. and Fenech 2014, 11; BBC 2014). The Jallianwala

¹⁰¹ With 80 % going into Pakistan (Takhar, 2018).

Bagh massacre at the hands of the British in 1919 also came to the forefront though the British prime minister's failure to formally apologise during his 2013 visit (Chhabra 2013).

Nationalist and religious zeal can run together; the flashpoint for the 1970's unrest in Punjab concerned sectarianism, a religious spark to a political movement (Juergensmeyer 2014, 389). On the other hand Takhar's suggestion that sectarian differences be subsumed in a wider Sikh federation provoked hostility from religious purists although it would create a stronger political front (Takhar 2016, 189). Diasporic Sikhs have their own issues such as turban-wearing and *kirpan* carrying, a reminder that the political identity of *Sikhi* need not just concern nationalist issues (Sian 2013, 18).

GKN is less nationalistic than many gurdwaras, shown by people's willingness to identify as Indian.¹⁰² When an MP told them that he was opposing the extradition to India of Parmjit Singh Sani, accused of being a Sikh terrorist, some feeling was expressed in favour of extradition, and the MP's efforts were not universally appreciated. I attended a national *Ramgarhia* Association meeting where the Indian vice-consul was a key speaker, and those there listened attentively to an appeal for the 1.5 million people of Indian extraction in the UK to work together rather than in separate communities.¹⁰³

The injustices Sikhs have faced and the political aspirations of some aroused my sympathies as I got to know about them, but they did not feel like my battles. I wanted to develop in the religious aspects of *Sikhi*, less so the political. Whenever Indian political issues were being considered I was conscious of my

¹⁰² Along with 61 % of the British Sikh population (*British Sikh Report 2017*, 19).

¹⁰³ This can be contrasted with the report that 225 out of 270 British gurdwaras have banned Indian officials from their premises on political grounds (Purohit 2018).

post-imperial cultural situation, brought up with a positive view of empire now being painfully unlearned, and in quiet conversation the effects of British meddling, particularly partition, were discussed (BBC 2017a). There are sharp questions about national identity in engaging with *Sikhi* from a white British background.

C) *Sikhi* and ethnicity

The great majority of Sikhs, 93%,¹⁰⁴ wish to identify themselves as ethnically Sikh, regarding the current option of only recording Sikhism as a religion as inadequate, and a campaign on this is gathering force (*UK Sikh Survey* 2016, 6; *Eastern Eye* 2017).¹⁰⁵ The suspicion of conversion can reinforce the ethnic link, though white converts I interviewed seemed unaware of this, one having been well received by a university Sikh society, another being invited at yoga class to hear a Sikh speaker¹⁰⁶ and a third being engaged by a street mission from *Basics of Sikhi*. I met such an evangelist at a feeding station, witnessing a half-hour discussion between him and a couple of clients. On the *Basics of Sikhi* website there are testimonials from Christian and other white British and Canadian converts, and descriptions of regular street missions, *parchar* (Basics of Sikhi 2016; Basics of Sikhi, no date; Basics of Sikhi, no date a).

The Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere, also known as 3HO, 'Healthy, Happy, Holy Organisation,' is particularly associated with white, *gora*,

¹⁰⁴ Although the methodology of the survey has been questioned, questioning rejected by its authors (Jhutti-Johal, 2017; Takhar 2018).

¹⁰⁵ This would be in accordance with a House of Lords ruling in 1983 which found that Sikhs are an ethnic group for the purposes of the Race Relations Act 1976 (*Mandla vs Dowell Lee*, cited in Jhutti-Johal 2011, 102–104). The court made the point that 'ethnic' in this context is not 'racial.'

¹⁰⁶ One convert commented 'a lot of times what does happen is that we are used as an example because we are atypical. Most white Sikhs typically have come into Sikhism through Yogi Bhaajan [3HO], and they are branded in a certain way, and that's not our focal point, we are just mainstream.'

converts (Takhar 2016, 158-178). Despite – or perhaps because of - being more zealous than many Punjabi Sikhs they are regarded with a suspicion that is not allayed by their claiming the authority of the *Akal Takht* to a leadership role in the West (Dusenbery 2014, 564). Disputed issues include the 3HO practices of yoga, ordaining ministers, and allowing women among the ceremonial *panj pyare* (Dusenbery 2014 562-563; Jhutti-Johal 2011, 115). An interviewee told me this latter is seen as a category mistake to which non-Punjabis are liable rather than as a feminist move.

All religion is encultured, and Punjabi *Sikhi* is infused with a sense of *izzat*, family honour, but ‘gora Sikhs cannot possibly accommodate this social culture that is so much a part of everyday Sikh behaviour’ (Takhar 2016, 187). The issue of language also features in this cultural divide –

‘language is another issue behind why the *gora* Sikhs are not accepted by Punjabi Sikhs [...] *Gora* Sikhs, as a community, cannot, in general, speak or understand Punjabi’...(Takhar 2016,187)

Converts I spoke to all recognised the language difficulty.

Neither of the white married partners of Punjabis I interviewed had had a Sikh religious wedding, *anand karaj*, something which would provoke hostility among some Sikhs (Neiyyar and Khatkar 2013).¹⁰⁷ I was told of a couple where the bride was white and she and her Punjabi groom had to go – along with many guests including my informant – to Italy for a gurdwara wedding, impossible in their own countries, England and Holland. She had taken part in the Sikh and Punjabi preliminaries, so I asked whether the problem was her ethnicity or her religion. He asked around the family and told me no-one knew; without the clear

¹⁰⁷A couple of white converts I contacted had been married in that way but they were both *Amritdhari*.

commitment of *amrit* the status of non-Punjabis engaging with *Sikhi* remains unclear, even to family members. White people I spoke to who had married Punjabis felt welcome in their gurdwaras and Sikh communities despite not having had *anand karaj*, though one described the painstaking steps needed to win over the family.

Sikhs welcome visitors, but my wish to worship as a Sikh was challenging for my



Figure 25: Multi-ethnic Sikh poster in Devsi's office.

hosts, and this was influenced by ethnic factors. I saw few white people at GKN, and, except for those who had married Punjabis, they were clearly guests. However 'for the first time in history, Sikhs have to draw lines between

the religious and cultural aspects of the Sikh heritage' (Mann 2006, 48, on the USA). My participation was raising this issue for those around me.

Between *gora* Sikhs and Punjabis in the West there is the further issue of the racism Sikhs face. It was only after knowing him a long time that a Sikh friend divulged that as a young man recently arrived in this country he was head-butted at a New Year celebration in Trafalgar Square, and left shocked and bleeding. Only one person offered any sympathy and the policeman he approached said 'what do you expect me to do about it?' He fled, beginning the New Year injured, frightened and alone. To hear these things was to feel diffidence in asking to be accepted by people who had suffered historically, recently, communally and

individually from my own ethnic and national group, but this diffidence was reduced by my apparent acceptance by those around me.

This reflection reminded me of the ethnic aspect of my inhabiting Christianity. Being white I rarely sense the 'low-key preference' given to white cultural norms in my own background, in the discipline of PT, and in a church still identified as institutionally racist (Beaudoin and Turpin 2014, 257; Bashir, 2016).

D) Caste and class

Caste should not have affected my belonging to *Sikhi*, which rejects caste discrimination, demonstrated by *langar* being a shared meal across caste, *panj pyare* being drawn from different castes, *amrit* being from a shared bowl, and *seva* thrusting people into defiling roles like shoe-cleaning. Caste may not be thought to concern me, as I was told there is no direct attempt to place white British in the caste system, though marriage to a white person can be a challenge to a family's honour (Sanghera 2009). However there remains a consciousness of caste within Punjabi culture as a preference for one's own kind in family affairs, as an aspect of *izzat*, and as discrimination. On a visit to a Ravidassi temple –

there was an explosion of pain when it was explained that the temple had started [separated from the gurdwara] when a lower caste person whose son had died tried to have a prayer said in the gurdwara. It wasn't allowed because he didn't have 'Singh' in his name.

Takhar considered the issue of Sikh identity through the nature of its sects and for some groups, notably the Ravidassis and the Valmikis, the point of focus is caste¹⁰⁸ (Takhar 2016, 3). Sato demonstrated clear caste delineations among

¹⁰⁸ 'Caste' is taken by some to refer only to the classic Hindu schema of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. Here what is being referred to is *zat*, inherited occupational groupings.

Leicester gurdwaras and there is a similar situation in Wolverhampton (Sato 2010).

GKN is a *Ramgarhia* gurdwara, and I was told that *Ramgarhia* means 'Custodians of the Castle of God,' not a caste but a *misl*, descendants of a military unit formed for the defence of *Harmandir Sahib*, and which became for a while the ruling group in the Sikh kingdom. However there remains awareness of the occupational grouping from which the *Ramgarhia* were drawn, the carpenters of the *Tarkhan* and blacksmiths of the *Lohar* groupings, which have some of the social dynamic associated with caste. The extended family aspect was exemplified for me at the national *Ramgarhia* Association meeting when there was much excited chatter as families met up. *Ramgarhia* have suffered from caste discrimination. I was told that GKN's predecessor was set up because the other gurdwaras in Wolverhampton were dominated by *Jats* and would never appoint *Ramgarhia* people to their committees, and I came across a Sikh problem page online where a *Jat* asked whether she could be justified in marrying a *Ramgarhia* boyfriend (Sbhullar 2015). One reply quoted the Sikh rejection of caste, but another warned against upsetting parents and the wider family by pursuing the relationship. When I told *Jat* friends that I was attending a *Ramgarhia* gurdwara they dismissed the need for caste-based gurdwaras at first, but then acknowledged that no *Ramgarhia* would ever be elected to their gurdwara committee, though no-one would ever say so publicly. I could clearly never be admitted to the *misl*, but my sympathies were engaged with them as victims of discrimination, by discovering their glorious but under-acknowledged history, and on being invited to attend their joyful national gathering.

I was gradually learning the limitations of my belonging, but it took time for me to wonder how the management committee, the central body of the gurdwara, was appointed and by whom. They were elected by the members, so I enquired about becoming a member, one of the few occasions in my fieldwork where as a researcher I went beyond what I might have done naturally, prompted by Stobert's encouragement to push the boundaries. A trustee gave me a copy of the constitution and discussed it with me. The official title of the organisation was the 'Ramgarhia Board (Sikh Temple) Wolverhampton,' and –

Membership of the Charity shall be open to *members of the Ramgarhia Community* [...] who shall satisfy the following conditions: a) 18 years and over b) shall have faith in the Sikh religion... (Ramgarhia Board 2011, 2, my italics)

I had come up against a model of religious membership with which I was unfamiliar. The courtesy of my hosts had held them back from raising an aspect of gurdwara life in which I could not participate, and there was some diffidence about the *misl*-based nature of the gurdwara, as advice had been given that this could be a source of legal trouble for them. I was touched that Devsi took it upon himself to pursue with the president the idea of an associate membership for me as a regular attender not from a *Ramgarhia* background. The president replied that it was an interesting idea and that he would ask what committee members thought, which I took to be a polite rejection. Despite Devsi asking again nothing came of it, but later there were developments over caste in the gurdwara which were to directly involve me.

This consideration of caste made me think about class issues in church. I was in a minority, perhaps alone, in having been privately educated, and had been brought up in a more wealthy suburb a few miles away, but this did not

seem very distinctive from the home-owning families sending their children off to university all around us. It also accorded with the middle-class expectation of Anglican clergy which may still be residually present in older church members. I was not conscious of class in that setting as a rule, but now wondered if others were, and, if so, in what way.

A rule of autoethnography is not to include material that may be painfully over-revealing (Adams, Jones and Ellis 2015, 62-66). These comments on my class – particularly stating that I was privately educated - have drawn that feeling of placing myself under the judgement of the reader. If it is hard for someone from another cultural background than the Indian subcontinent to find an open guide to caste issues, I must also recognise a corresponding awkwardness about class in such key areas as self-identity, business opportunity and choice of life-partner, despite research clearly showing the self-perpetuating mechanisms involved (Lawler 2014, 159).

E) Review of Christian identity

i) Identity in general

Considering Sikh identity was making me think about identity itself more carefully, and the specific question 'Who is a Christian?' This is in a context of people's multiple identities across many criteria, the complexity of intersectionality, often studied through autoethnography as a way of dealing with the specificity that arises (Boylorn and Orbe 2014). There is a role for the community as well as the individual in establishing such identities, as it sets out what is allowed and even what is imaginable: 'there is no aspect of identity that lies outside social relations' (Lawler 2014, 180). My own move, though outside the cognisance of either Christianity or *Sikhi*, has been made possible by a wider

culture of freedom of religion, and respect for identity autonomy in other areas such as sexuality and gender. On the other hand individuals shape culture, and I had been aware of Christians and Sikhs alike reacting to my project, and in some cases rethinking their own attitudes.

ii) Religious identity

Within this wider context mixed religious identity is just one aspect, whether understood negatively as syncretism or religious consumerism, or arising naturally from mixed families or communities (Miller 2013; Ruparell 2013, 118; Jesudason, Rajkumar and Dayam 2016, 3; Moyaert 2015, 3, 5, 6). There is also a longitudinal fluidity of religious identity; people and communities change¹⁰⁹ perhaps through specific experiences, as with some of the converts I interviewed, or through wider cultural changes, as in the West European drift away from religious engagement.

iii) Christian identity

Identity is questioned less in Christianity than in *Sikhi*, though it is sometimes a practical problem.¹¹⁰ There are some off-the-shelf answers: liturgical tests related to baptism or participation in the Eucharist; doctrinal tests of faith in Jesus's death bringing salvation or in the Trinity; or experiential tests, being born again or speaking in tongues. My self-understanding as a Christian would be problematic in some quarters. There are groupings who regard Anglican or Methodist claims

¹⁰⁹ Thompson, provides an example, showing his alteration over time and through experience by dramatizing a dialogue between an earlier more conservative Christian self and his later identity as a Buddhist Christian (Thompson 2011).

¹¹⁰ In one church where I served my predecessor had introduced a policy of only baptising the children of church attenders and my relaxing this, agreed with church council, was not universally popular among the congregation. The issues are laid out in Dalby (1989); and Lawrence shows the effect of different understandings of church in approaches to christening/baptism (Lawrence 2018).

to be Christian as either defective or delusional, and others outside and within the Anglican Communion for whom liberal views over doctrine, sexuality, interreligious and interdenominational issues would be problematic. There are times every day when I would on reflection find my own actions or attitudes ethically 'unchristian'. These judgements mostly operate in separate communal realms within which they seem self-evident, but Lakeland has considered the issue in a multi-faith context, concluding with 'a typically post-modern move': Christians must live with an ambiguity that requires the notion of 'modified or relative difference' from other meta-narratives, though not relative in relation to a norm (Lakeland 1997, 81-84). A clearer response was needed after Vatican II, when ecclesial certainties were disturbed by the acknowledgement that there were Christians outside Catholic Church structures. Küng and von Balthasar both addressed this issue, and from their contrasting viewpoints of social engagement and aesthetic mysticism came to similar conclusions. For Küng, Christians are called to be 'radically human', adopting an attitude of absolute trust rather than chasing and relying on their own achievement. 'Anyone who does not live for himself will [...] become truly human, will gain meaning, identity, freedom' (Küng 2008, 569). For von Balthasar a practising Christian is one who lives Christ's love, entering the personal humiliation of faith (Balthasar 2014, 102, 107). There must be the assent of availability, identified with the task of building the kingdom (Balthasar 2014, 114-117).

There is a parallel with Vedic *karma* in this requirement to be available to God's will, so perhaps it is possible to fulfil the demands of two religions at once, a coherence through practice. However the element of submission involved is not without its problems. At a focus group I was asked about my understanding

of worship and referred to 'two aspects: adoration and submission.' A participant responded 'I feel happier with the adoration than the submission. I don't think I could be a Catholic or a Muslim because of the submission, that's not me'¹¹¹. 'Submission' has been so abused by the patriarchal church (and *sangat*¹¹²) as to be a suspect spiritual category (Baird with Gleeson 2017). It also cuts against the liberating transcendentalism explored with Stobert. Further, if I am to maintain a personal element to this submission, I am submitting to two people, Guru Nanak and Jesus, inevitably setting myself up as arbiter, a role that is incompatible with submission to either. And yet von Balthasar and Küng cannot be ignored in their call for submission; Christian and Sikh worship both have aspects of *tremendum* as well as *fascinans* (Otto 1958). The Anglican liturgy has a regular call to penitence and promise of moral and cultic restoration, and *Guru Granth Sahib Ji*, a liturgical text as well as a scripture, requires *gurmukh*, walking in the way of the Guru by grace sought in prayer.

Panikkar offers a more fluid approach to Christian identity in the context of MRP: '*the criterion for christian [sic]*¹¹³ *identity lies ultimately in the sincere confession of a person, validated by a corresponding recognition of a community*' (Panikkar 2010, 123, his italics). This definition is relational and functional, with content changing with time and place; and it is transcendental: 'an elusive and never exhaustive manifestation of a reality which transcends every human attempt to pinpoint it' (Panikkar 2010, 129, 133, 136). It usually arises from differentiation, but could instead come from a principle of unity, such as a

¹¹¹ I replied that maybe 'submission' is not quite the right word, and tried 'letting go of ego' instead, to which participants responded 'that's different', and I could only reply feebly 'I'm not sure it's as different as you think it is, but there we go'.

¹¹² *Sangat*: Sikh congregation.

¹¹³ Throughout the article Panikkar uses the lower case initial in 'christian.'

Christian being someone for whom the Christ symbol touches their central mystery, and who recognises the community as the keeper of that symbol (Panikkar 2010, 131, 137). I felt able to make a Christian confession throughout the research, and this self-identification was reciprocated by most Christians with whom I dealt.

The research also raised the issue of my belonging to the Beacon Church, something I considered in my twelve month report (Appendix 7) and discussed with my Christian interlocutor, Dyson -

Me: Church Council were a bit surprised that I'd raised the question, but I'll have been there less than four years when I retire, having been parachuted in. Also a Methodist minister doesn't actually belong to a congregation but to the circuit, and a sign of that, apart from every month going off to another church, is my being formally welcomed to the service by the stewards each Sunday.

Dyson: So that was something that has definitely come out of experiences at the gurwadara?

Me: I don't think it would have occurred to me. And I'm not sure it's occurred to anyone in a theoretical sense. I'm sure it occurs to ministers the whole time on an emotional level, 'Do I belong here or not?' but I don't know of any theorising at all.

F) Findings with regard to these issues

i) Identity is relational between community and individual

Whether I was a Sikh or a Christian was a matter for the respective communities as much if not more than me, but I and other individuals can affect community judgements. These judgements occur at a meeting point between the institutional and historic and the personal and instinctive.

ii) Belonging is not an exclusively faith-based matter

Sikhi is interwoven with *Punjabi*¹¹⁴, and *gora* Sikhs are not entirely integrated into *Sikhi* as it stands, although this may change with time, place and grouping. No religion exists in a 'pure' state without cultural manifestation, a manifestation with which any postulant has to engage.

iii) Belonging is different with different religions and groupings

Different religions and different groupings within and across religions have markedly different ways of characterising people and communities, including over the issue of belonging. Even formal membership is not always straightforward or universally available, and discovering informal aspects of belonging can be a lengthy and testing process.

iv) Christian identity problematised

All the above (i–iii) are as true of Christianity as of any other religion, introducing an unexpected element of provisionality into my own Christian identity.

¹¹⁴ The cultural heritage and ethos of the people of the Punjab.

8. A NEW PLACE

The sense that my place was settled was proving illusory. As well as the challenges to be faced there were developments in my spiritual life and in my Sikh social context.

A) Fieldwork

i) Own practice

My limited aim was to find out how regular public worship with the *sangat* affected me, and so I did not commit myself to participate in Sikh life outside that, though I followed up any invitations which were practicable, like the national *Ramgarhia* Association meeting. I had two invitations to travel to India, one from the Canadian-based gurdwara and one from Devsi, but for practical reasons could not accept either.

I tried various forms of private devotion, Christian and Sikh. I have fallen back on some form of Morning Prayer – with many breaks – since my school days, and during the time of fieldwork was doing so when possible with a small group in a neighbouring parish. I also read through and got familiar with *Jap Ji*, the foundational Sikh scriptural passage, setting time aside, as well as referring to it on my phone when I had a few moments, until the secretary said such casual reading was disrespectful. I set out to gradually read *Guru Granth Sahib Ji* through, something which Sikhs do over 24 hours at a special event in the gurdwara, but I got less than a third of the way. I knew the theory of the layout of *Guru Granth Sahib Ji*,¹¹⁵ but could rarely find a piece from a reference given,

¹¹⁵ Each entry is ordered first by the tune set for that piece, then by author, gurus first then other saints (who may or may not be Sikh), then by its metric form, with the longer pieces first. There is an introduction of three liturgical prayers and an epilogue of miscellaneous works (Singh, P. 2014a, 131).

except by the standardised page numbers. I then switched to following the *hukamnama*, the chosen scripture, sometimes using the section displayed on the board at GKN, but more often the one issued at *Harminder Sahib* daily and widely available on apps and websites (SGPC 2018). For some months I chose a few words from each passage, jotting them down with reflections.

I have since the 1980's engaged with the World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM), and I receive their *Daily Wisdom*, intermittently using their mantra '*maranatha*', 'come Lord' (Freeman 2008, 142). In Sikh meditation, *simran*, at home I used the refrain '*Waheguru*,' 'wonderful Lord,' a Sikh term for God (Kalsi 2007, 139). I experimented with using both together as their meanings did not clash and they worked together rhythmically with similar stresses on the two words, but there remained something aesthetic rather than theological that jarred, so that, without realising, I would revert to using one or the other alone. Perhaps introducing duality into this meditative setting was disruptive, or maybe the resulting phrase was over-complex. I continued to use both, but separately. They had exactly the same effect on me, including occasionally bursts of a delightful though ephemeral feeling of lightness, both visual and with regard to weight, and of physical joy. When I heard a Western couple describing the union with God they had discovered in *simran* I wondered whether it was something like these experiences to which they were referring.



Figure 27: The khanda, Sikh emblem.

Sikh meditation is balanced by a practical side. In the Sikh emblem, the *khanda*, two swords, *miri piri*, recognise the military (*amir*) and spiritual (*pir*) aspects

(Singh, N.-G. K. 2011, 41). The *khanda* is open to many interpretations including that of symbolising the balanced practice of *Sikhi* in daily life and meditation (Cole 2003, 14).¹¹⁶ Daily life includes *kirat karna*, providing for one's family by working for a living. Originally a challenge to mendicant holy men, it has become part of the Sikh ethic of self-advancement (Dhillon and Thomas 2018). I have had a sustained employment history, but wonder if I am still fulfilling this as a retired person. *Waand chhakna* is the sharing of one's earnings, something which I have practised by regular planned donations to *Christian Aid*. *Daswandh*, the donation of a tithe to the Guru, is mirrored to some extent by my donations to church (Kalsi 2007, 47-49). I also make contributions to the gurdwara when I attend, which seem on a par with the announcements of other donations, though further gifts must be made anonymously. These challenges of *Sikhi* are similar to those of Christianity, apart from the prudence of *kirat karna* which has no clear parallel, and for me they bring the same mixed awareness of fulfilment and shortcoming.

ii) Congregational visit

The Beacon congregation was supportive of my engagement with *Sikhi*, and in June 2016 I asked if they would like to visit the gurdwara. Six said they would though only three were eventually able to do so. We went one Saturday morning, a quiet time, which influenced their experience. It seemed to them a holy place where people were naturally prayerful, in contrast with the busyness they experienced at church, at which they all had responsibilities. They were impressed by the gentleness of the Sikhs they came across, the welcome they

¹¹⁶ The emblem also includes a two-edged sword, also known as the *khanda*, indicating the same balance of spirituality and practice, and the *chakka*, a circular throwing weapon suggesting eternity and wholeness. The *chakka* has come to replace the earlier *deg*, or cooking pot (Hawley 2014, 324-325).

received, and the food which they contrasted favourably with the limited refreshments at church. I was struck by their openness. They were interested in the development of the building, implying an expected strong future. In all they received a positive impression, which I did not attempt to shift although it is not always that peaceful there, and Sikhs are not so gentle when giving martial arts demonstrations. Their visit was affirmative of *Sikhi* and of my engagement with it. They also reported being drawn to pray there, without experiencing any challenge to their Christian identity.

This visit to the gurdwara was nearly matched by a Sikh outing to church, as I was asked to arrange a Christmas visit to the local church for a group. I prepared for a visit to Midnight Mass at a nearby church, the parish priest was most welcoming, and I told the gurdwara secretary what was going on as I did not wish it to be seen as undercover Christian evangelism. A couple of days before the visit, however, it became clear that no-one would be coming; the person who had approached me was unable to come herself and the others fell away.

iii) Friendliness in meditation

My meditation in the gurdwara did not have the ecstatic aspect I occasionally experienced at home, but had developed a mellow warmth. It was as though the friendship I was experiencing round me was being matched, indeed surpassed, by what I was experiencing within. By December 2016 I had begun to reflect on this sensation: 'Jesus says "I call you friends", and friendship with Guru Nanak, why not? His companions were friends too, and there need be no exclusivity in friendship.'

By February 2017 I was distinguishing this warmth from both the transcendental void and the intensity of *bahti*, and by the end of the month was confirming that friendship (or friendliness as I more clearly defined the sensation) was to be a key theological theme. This linked back to my experience of Jesus' friendliness in the vision, to the friendship around me in gurdwara and church, and to stories of Nanak's own friendliness, as well as a sense of being drawn into a pre-existing friendship between Jesus and Nanak, similar to how Christians have experienced the invitation of the Trinity. That persistent experience, more positive than the 'temptation' of MRP described by Sundermeier, was to challenge me to engage with the genre of theology of religions to give it expression (Gaston 2017, 43).

iv) Seva

My Sikh experience broadened following an interview with Parry in which he linked Christianity and *Sikhi* through regnocentric (kingdom-centred) theology and *seva*. I was already doing *seva* by washing up at GKN, but knew of feeding stations being run by Sikhs for people on the streets and contacted one of them, the *Midland Langar Seva Society*, becoming involved from March 2017 in serving



hot food to homeless people every Monday evening in Birmingham, somewhere I could continue to reach from my retirement address. I got consent to record my experience while protecting the privacy of the

Figure 28: Midland Langar Seva Society van.

clients, extending the original ethical approval from the university.

I presented myself to those enquiring as someone trying to be a Sikh, not just an observer, as well as a Christian (I was then wearing my clerical collar) and recording the experience from my own point of view. The first sessions were in the pouring rain so I wore a coat with a hood, and with my grizzled appearance was indistinguishable from the clients, but after a week or two I began to be recognised as one of the team. The rain and cold and the obvious need of the people queueing ensure that this feels¹¹⁷ a real act of service. When it is dry I wear the same headscarf as in the gurdwara, putting it on as I arrive as some of the other Sikhs do. People mill about, expectant but anxious, waiting for a van to pull up with the orange *Midland Langar Seva Society* logo on it. Other helpers arrive by car, one bringing an urn of freshly cooked pasta. I twice helped cook this when I lived near the gurdwara where it was prepared, using the industrial-scale kitchen there.

Before we begin there is a time of prayer and the Sikh standard is usually displayed. A normal meal consists of pasta, pizza, samosas, a drink, and a selection from fruit, crisps, biscuits or sweets, depending on what is available, and we feed around 160 people. I was invited to join in from the first time I went, often preparing the trays for the pasta. I work with perhaps half a dozen regular volunteers, Sikh families doing *seva* for some special occasion, and helpers who come from work as a part of their community involvement, so we are usually well staffed. Everyone is found something to do, recognising the importance of *seva* for all participants. The volunteers treat the clients respectfully, some reserved and business-like, others friendly. The food is vegetarian which the clients

¹¹⁷ In the present tense as this is continuing as I write.

accept; this only becomes an issue when people come from a nearby Muslim feeding station and bring meat curry with them, when they are told to finish it before coming to us. I never see any communication between the feeding stations.

Participation has introduced me to people, mainly younger, who take *Sikhi* seriously, attend a range of gurdwaras, and by their engagement offer an implied criticism to those who take *seva* obligations less seriously.

v) The employment tribunal

In March 2017 a committee member approached me as we moved out of the *durbar*. 'Can I have a word with you afterwards please?' This felt a rather formal request, and I was uneasy as well as curious.

'The committee would like you to write a letter to say that you have been allowed to do *seva*. It's for a tribunal.' He explained the background, relating this request with a controversy that had been rumbling on in the gurdwara for some time. The distribution of work permits to *granthis* coming from India had led to bad feeling, even on one occasion to a few punches being swung and the police being called. The majority of the committee felt the permits had been wrongly handled and had tried to relieve the person dealing with this of his responsibility, something he had resisted, with some support from family members. His brother was now claiming that he had been prevented from standing for the committee on caste grounds, and was taking a case for compensation to the tribunal. He said he had been prevented from doing *seva*, a prerequisite for election, because they thought he was not *Ramgarhia* (though in fact he was). The committee's response was that the post at issue was not a matter of employment, that the plaintiff hardly ever attended the gurdwara and that he had never offered *seva*,

let alone been prevented. I was invited to write to say that, although not *Ramgarhia*, my *seva* had been welcomed. This was something to be attested for their convenience but also felt like a sign of a new level of acceptance, and I wanted to please these committee members in return. On the other hand I was anxious about participating in such a wrangle, a principled worry about bullying, only having heard one side of the story, and a less principled one that by taking one side I would be making enemies on the other. I was warned that my letter would be passed on to the plaintiff's family and that I may hear from them, and family connections within the gurdwara meant I had no idea of the ramifications. I agreed to do it, sticking to the specific issue in hand. I heard nothing for several weeks, but then came a phone call asking me to write the letter that night and attend a tribunal the next day to swear to it as mine and face cross-examination.

I attended the anonymous office block in Birmingham where the tribunal was to meet. Suddenly there was an influx of committee members, eight of them, arrived from Wolverhampton by train. They were suited, several were turbaned and they were talking together, largely in Punjabi. They were very pleased to see me and seemed to take it in turns to keep me company. I was in my clerical collar and felt both my inclusion in and separateness from the group, and the ushers found it difficult to place me, rechecking which case I was waiting for. When their barrister came he did not pick up the issue about my *seva*, taking me instead as general evidence that non-*Ramgarhia* people were welcome in the gurdwara. The plaintiff failed to appear but was represented by a friend who, despite the chair's help, was unable to show any employment issue was at stake. My letter was accepted without question, and I left for a parish appointment. My contribution seemed much appreciated but I was not convinced it had served

much purpose. Later I had the message that the claim had failed and the judge had also awarded the gurdwara costs, a major concern for them. Going into the gurdwara next Sunday I was greeted with appreciation by a number of members, leading others to ask what had been going on, giving me the unusual feeling of being an insider.

B) Findings at this stage

i) Friendliness has religious significance

Friendliness is not just a social experience but also a spiritual one, and it calls for attention from exponents of theology of religions.

ii) New place is not stable

The sense of stability, being held in orbit, identified in Chapter 6, proved open to further development, changing from event to event, decision to decision. These developments happened through my initiative (*seva*), or the gurdwara's (tribunal), and through developments from spiritual practice.

iii) Belonging is a flexible concept

Belonging/not-belonging is not binary, but, both in its subjective and its communal aspects, varies in degree and type.

iv) Belonging brings obligations

My engagement with the tribunal felt like an obligation to those who asked me, borne of gratitude and of belonging, of identifying with them, as could be said of my regular financial contributions. My engagement with *seva* grew from a sense of obligation to express my *Sikhi* outside the gurdwara, to match spirituality and life-style.

9. DESCRIBING MYSELF

As I progressed through the fieldwork people asked me how I was getting on. My response was not just descriptive but also formative, helping shape what was happening to me, and I had to consider what to call myself.

A) Fieldwork

i) Nanak panthi

The *Rehat Maryada*'s veto on Sikhs owing 'allegiance to any other religion' was a limiting factor for me as I had no wish to turn away from my Christian faith, and it applies not just to *Amritdhari* but to any Sikh (Dharam Parshar Committee 2014, 7). When I realised this I ceased to describe myself as Sikh. I looked back wistfully to a time when the demarcation was not so clear-cut, and started to call myself a *Nanak panthi*, a follower of Guru Nanak. Another Christian who was engaging in *Sikhi* and had gone further than me in her life-style also decided not to pursue *amrit* because of the need to forswear Christianity, but to take the *Nanak panthi* identity. Being *Nanak panthi* also distanced me from those *gora* who irritate by taking on the designation, outward appearance and spiritual practice of *Sikhi* while remaining distant from *Punjabi*.

It was as a *Nanak panthi* that I reported to the gurdwara congregation at the end of 2016 (Appendix 7), reading the report out in the gurdwara and printing off copies which were all taken, with more still being requested weeks later. I also presented myself as a *Nanak panthi* in an article I was asked to write for *Mann Jitt* (Appendix 8), which was also published in Interfaith Wolverhampton's newsletter, and which I sent to my bishop and to the *Presence and Engagement* national coordinator, generating encouraging responses (Barnett 2017).

ii) Following Guru Nanak and Jesus

Being a *Nanak panthi* is a personal commitment to Guru Nanak, something that was growing on me. I wrote in the article –

The more I hear and read about Guru Nanak Dev Ji the more I revere him and find his teachings attractive. [...] First, Guru Nanak's emphasis on non-discrimination in terms of religion, caste and gender, while consistent with Christianity, [...] is more clearly stated. Second, as I come to retirement, the model of Guru Nanak finishing his missionary journeys and settling down to the life of a householder appeals. Third, I find Guru Nanak easier to identify with than the later more communal and military tradition of Sikhism [...] Fourth, his criticism of the Hinduism of the day, like Jesus's criticism of some religious practices of his time, strikes me as liberating.

I also expressed my continuing loyalty to Jesus, and in the face of the assumption that *karma* is always mono-religious, stated my conviction of a two-fold calling -

I also remain committed to Jesus because knowing he gave his life for his friends is inspiring, his call for forgiveness is a way of changing the world, and his mysterious resurrection is a powerful sign that love is stronger than death. That and a lifetime's commitment to following him means there is no intention to break my loyalty to him in seeking to follow Guru Nanak as well, something that is appreciated by Sikh friends who would never encourage me to convert, but to follow the *karma* given me, this *karma* of two-foldness.

iii) Selective Sikhi

One facet of this concentration on Guru Nanak was my hesitation over the more militaristic aspect of *Sikhi*. At the West Park *Vaisakhi* celebrations I watched young men and boys give martial arts displays, and heard children read about Sikh heroes killing hundreds of thousands of their adversaries; and I have seen young men unselfconsciously wearing Khalistan tee shirts illustrated with submachine guns. The readings were no worse than the Book of Judges, which I spiritualise or historicise without much reflection, I had taken part in rifle training as an Air Training Corps chaplain with only faint discomfort, and illustrations of the torture and deaths of Sikh heroes share their gory fascination with those of their Christian counterparts in the Spanish hotels where I stayed as a boy. A

member of Beacon church pressed for Mel Gibson's gruesome film of Jesus' crucifixion to be shown in church one Passiontide, something only prevented by (this time welcome) technical failure (*The Passion of Christ* 2004). It was not that I thought less of *Sikhi* because of these aspects or that they are alien to me as a Christian, but rather that I did not want any more than I had already ingested.

iv) Discussion with Bhogal

My self-identifications as a Christian and a *Nanak panthi* were both challenged when I interviewed Bhogal, interreligious activist and former President of the British Methodist Conference, about the relationship of the *Sikhi* into which he was born with Christianity. He affirmed his Sikh roots, and preferred to call himself a 'follower of Christ' rather than a 'Christian.' He acknowledged his place in and need for the Christian community, but withheld his identification with the history of the church, its fragmentation, institutional insensitivity, and violence.

There would have been a symmetry in my being a 'follower of Christ' alongside *Nanak panthi*, both having a personal rather than an institutional focus, though I preferred 'follower of Jesus' to 'follower of Christ' as 'Christ' is a title soaked in the theological speculation of the institution itself, but then I lost confidence in Bhogal's distinction because this quibble had brought me up against the complex relationship between founder and religion. The historical Jesus has been curated by the church, even the Jesus of my own vision in 2007 was a cultural product, a gift of the church (Katz 1983). As a cradle Christian I was so utterly formed by the community that to claim otherwise was not an option. I could be selective about which aspects of that tradition I accepted, but all Christians select, some by individual discernment, all by cultural formation, and to identify all the attractive aspects of the faith with Jesus and all the difficult

ones with the later church is distorting and naïve (Pattison 2007a). To refuse the description 'Christian' was an unwarranted attempt to distance myself from the community in which I was formed and continue to be sustained.

My approach to *Sikhi* as a *Nanak panthi* was similarly challenged. The stories of Nanak's life, the *janam-sakhi*, had at least as long gestating in community traditions as the Christian gospels; the community at Kartarpur with *sangat* and *langar*, and the lineage of subsequent Gurus (or 'Nanak's') are both established by him (Singh P. 2014, 22). The theory that Sikh militarism or the formation of the *Khalsa* was caused by an influx of *Jats* rather than the need of Guru Nanak's community to preserve itself has been found wanting (Fenech 2014, 38). My practical knowledge of *Sikhi* had come from the living *sangat*, it is with them I eat, worship and ask questions. Any discernment I exercised could not be based on some unmediated source in the historical Guru; it related to the Sikh tradition as I had found it, historical, cultural and political.

v) Nanak panthi revisited

I nonetheless retain the description *Nanak panthi*, not now to distance myself from later aspects of *Sikhi*, but to indicate among Sikhs the space I am taking to acknowledge Christ, and to try to avoid *gora* presumptuousness.

B) Self-questionnaire

Alongside collocations and guided reflections I used a monthly self-questionnaire to look for longitudinal comparisons, something that allowed for subsequent data analysis of responses (Denscombe 2010, 155-156). I have not found other examples of self-questioning, as contrasted with those self-administered questionnaires where questions are set by other people (Wolf 2008, 803-804).

I used a semantic differential but only indicated the beginning and end of the scale, and used what was in retrospect too long a scale (1-10); 1-5 with each grade clearly defined would have been better (Denscombe 2010, 168). I regret not making notes on reasons for change at the time, but have reconstructed some by referring to my journal. While acknowledging those limitations I defend the introduction of numbers and graphs from the accusation that this is an excrescence of quantitative research in a qualitative context. It is investigating subjective experience and using the researcher's subjectivity, it is only using measurable variables alongside meaningful stories; and it is being used to generate hypotheses rather than test them, all features of qualitative research (Auerbach and Silverstein 2003, 4, 22-28). There are in any case calls for qualitative and quantitative research to be regarded as complementary strategies and for a place for mixed methods research, made easier where the hierarchical approach to research with its low view of the qualitative is rejected, as it is here (Auerbach and Silverstein 2003, 22; Kara 2015, 26; Smith 2009, 60). The key question is whether it generates interesting and useful data.

The questions were –

On a scale of 1 – 10 where 1 is 'not at all' and 10 is 'completely':

- a. How easy are you finding it to practise the two religions?
- b. How loyal a Christian do you feel?
- c. How much do you identify with Sikhism?
- d. How much do you identify with the label Christian-Sikh?
- e. How much do you identify with the label Sikh-Christian?
- f. How much is practising two religions having an impact on how you live?
- g. How much would you recommend anyone else to try this?

i) Questions b) and c)



Figure 29: Self-questionnaire: loyalty and identification.

The different style of the two questions reflected my starting point of rootedness in Christianity and freshness to Sikhism.¹¹⁸ Overall there is a slight improvement in Christian loyalty and a marked improvement in Sikh identity, though this may just signify my desire that the research be worthwhile. The dip in identification with Sikhism in November 2015 is when the first gurdwara rejected my request to research there, and the recovery in January coincides with the approval at GKN. The dip in May 2016 coincides with discussions that month on Sikh antipathy to *Ek Niwas* temple, and with the Ravidassi outburst on Sikh caste consciousness. I also see (26 May) 'bored for the first time at the gurdwara', the only recording of boredom throughout the fieldwork. The recovery in June is matched by a note: 'Feel more Sikh again. Using *Waheguru* in

¹¹⁸ As I then called *Sikhi*.

meditation suddenly feels more natural... I am coping with the physical thing of praying.' The divergence in August 2016 reflects Peter's illness and my grasping at a Christian identity in response. The November 2016 dip in Christian loyalty coincides with the conversation with Stobert about 'killing' Jesus, the closest I came to a transcendentalist position. After that there is a higher level in both religious identifications, moving toward the positive conclusion of fieldwork and ministry.

I explored my engagements with the two religions, which increased and which decreased, month by month.

Year	2015	2016	2017
Month	N D / J F M A M J J A S O N D / J F M A M J		
Q. b. (Christian)	- - - - ↓ - ↑ - ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ - ↓ ↑ - ↑		
Q. c. (Sikh)	↓ ↑ ↑ - - - ↓ ↑ ↓ ↓ ↑ ↑ ↓ ↑ - ↓ ↑ ↓ - ↑		

Figure 30: Monthly movements in engagement with Christianity and Sikhi

There were three months where neither value moved, and seven months where only one value moved. Where both values moved they diverged or moved in the same direction with equal frequency, five months each. There was therefore no pattern of choosing between the two loyalties, something which would have been marked by a more sustained inverse relationship of attachment between them.

ii) Questions d) and e)

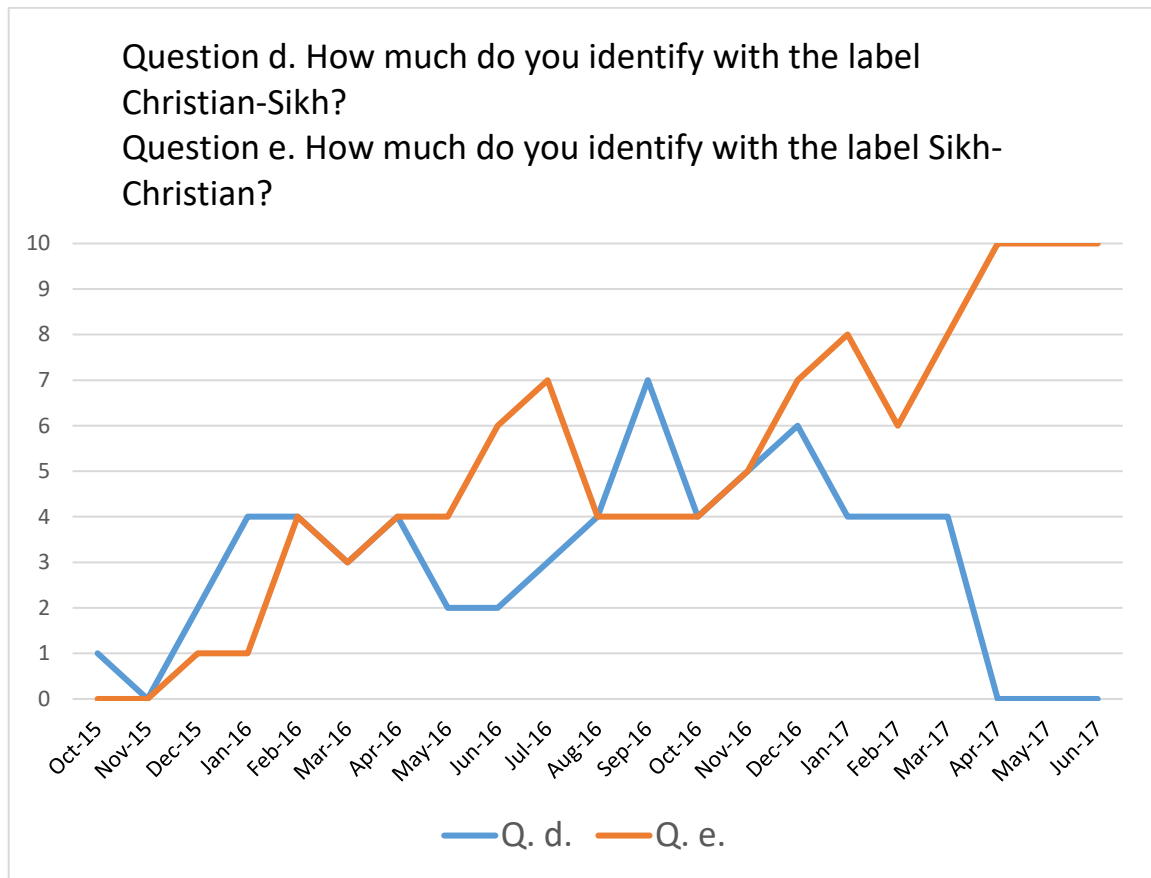


Figure 31: Self-questionnaire: hyphenated identity.

The attempt to sharpen the issue of identity by asking how I chose to describe myself was disappointing because of a lack of initial coherence and consistency about how I used hyphenated identities (Goosen 2011). I cannot account for the divergence that opens out in July 2016 nor the high value for 'Christian-Sikh' in September 2016, though I did at an earlier stage think of myself as a Christian-Sikh, understanding 'Sikh' as student. Values recorded do not show any effect of my adoption of the term *Nanak panthi* by December 2016. The settled choice from April 2017 of the label 'Sikh-Christian' marks a clarified

understanding of myself as substantively Christian with Sikhism as a qualifier, regarding 'Christian' as the noun and the preceding 'Sikh' as adjectival.¹¹⁹

iii) Questions a), f) and g)



Figure 32: Self-questionnaire: practising two religions.

All three questions received more positive answers at the end of the fieldwork than at the beginning. The dip in November 2015 across all questions reflects the rejection at the first gurdwara. The divergence in May 2016 suggests I have at that stage established a rhythm which is easy to manage but no longer

¹¹⁹ It is an awkward choice phonetically. 'Sikh-Christian' with the 'K-C' sound does not flow as easily as 'Christian-Sikh', and 'Christian' sounds more adjectival than 'Sikh,' though both can be adjective or noun.

having its first impact. I also note that in May I met – and in some cases interviewed – people from multi-faith families who found their own MRP normal and easy. The fall in willingness to recommend MRP and in ease of practice in August 2016 coincide with Peter's illness. It is not until October 2016 that the effect on my life of MRP reached the mid-point, 5. I cannot explain the upturn then but the increase in April 2017 coincides with my involvement in *seva* in Birmingham.

C) Findings at this stage

i) Belonging – Christian or Sikh – is holistic.

Belonging means that criticism is an internal dialogical activity in relation to the whole tradition and community in contrast with the visitor's selection of preferred elements to incorporate elsewhere. I could not follow Jesus and Nanak without church and *sangat* and all they entail.

ii) The place of the audience

When describing myself I must consider who I am addressing, and how I will be heard. 'Sikh-Christian' would be heard as presumptuous and offensive where *Sikhi* is bound up with *Punjabi* or with *amrit*, and would confront some Christians. In other situations 'Sikh-Christian' would focus discussion and reflect my self-understanding as closely as possible. If different descriptions are appropriate for different audiences such difference must be managed carefully, as spheres of discourse are not sealed. Referring to myself as *Nanak panthi* is an attempt to do that.

iii) Belonging can be subtle

This points to something obvious but often overlooked, that many people have a 'near enough' description of themselves, but can qualify or flex that in many ways.

iv) Clash of loyalties not characteristic of MRP

The self-questionnaire confirms the cognitive dissonance theory in that questions b) and c) do not show an overall inverse relationship between loyalty to Christianity and identification with *Sikhi*. I am not shown as torn between them despite the contradictions involved.

10. FINAL PHASE OF FIELDWORK

The fieldwork, the story-within-a-story, comes to a happy ending that reflects the experience, but the tidiness of this is disrupted by more critical material, and will be rendered less final by the sequel, and a qualified conclusion.

A) Fieldwork

i) A chapter of errors

My passage through the experience was strewn with errors. When recognised these are evidence of learning, and in claiming my experience is of interest I am obliged to indicate their presence, while being conscious that readers, especially Sikhs, may recognise errors of which I am still unaware, something which gives the piece a confessional element. I have already referred to some of these failings: the technological errors in leading Christian worship, lapses of concentration, misunderstandings on circuit; and in gurdwaras the 'Muslim' hat, the *Jap Ji* on the phone, sitting incorrectly, not recognising the tuning of the drum, misunderstanding the naming ceremony, above all the failure to learn Punjabi. Such misunderstandings and failings continued throughout my fieldwork.

When I was presenting my twelve-monthly report to the GKN committee I asked a friend to give it to the secretary as he went in to a meeting himself. He looked confused and abashed, so I asked him what was wrong. There was a pause, then he said 'I *am* the secretary.' Then who was the man who gave out the notices, who I was sure (or was I still?) people called 'secretary'? My companion said 'Oh, he is the stage secretary, I am the committee secretary. If it's for the committee would you like me to take it?' I was left wondering how I had gone so long without realising there were two – or more – secretaries, and what else I was not understanding.

Coming up to the last month of my fieldwork I had a bad day. 'Wash your hands!' someone barked at me in the entrance hall. I had covered my head and taken off my shoes but had forgotten my ablutions. It was a disappointing sign, even after this time, of how little I was really enculturated, embodied, into gurdwara life.

The gurdwara was crowded, with a large family programme going on. Things were ahead of the usual schedule, the *Ardas* had begun so I did not make obeisance at the front but slunk in at the back. People were milling around, some on their mobiles, with plenty of noise coming from the *langar* hall. Behaviour may not have really been more casual than usual; perhaps, irritated after my rebuke, I noticed it more. It occurred to me that the familial nature of the *Ramgarhia* means that the people who come to such infrequent occasions are 'us' in a way that I would never be, and that those who booked the programme would have made a substantial financial contribution to the gurdwara. My shame at my mean-spirited response to the large attendance, and my marginality in the family gathering, together with my earlier error over the handwashing, made this an uncomfortable day. Then on the way out someone commented on the attack on Westminster Bridge: 'of course we've been fighting these people [Muslims] for 500 years. They are going to be doing this forever.'

ii) Reflections on being corrected

After 20 months of weekly attendance my experience was still very different from cradle Sikhs around me.¹²⁰ Realising this is humbling, challenging the *manmukh*

¹²⁰ '...looking back I remember now my aunt, my father's cousin-sister, [...] she told me stories, and I still remember them [...] an elderly person tells you stories and you remember them all your life, which I am doing to my grandson as well. [...] "Papa, two stories every night!" This is how you learn. You don't learn from books. You pass it on from generation to generation' (Devs).

(ego), and friendship and corrections alike were also building me into the community, meeting in partnership my attempts to identify with my hosts. They offered occasions of 'rupture and repair,' a recognised aspect of socialisation as well as meaning-making (Tronick 1989). People who had before probably only experienced guiding their own children were not just instructing me about the community but inducting me into it. It was sometimes said 'as a student you need to know this' when I was corrected or given insights into the gurdwara management or politics, but it became apparent that they felt that I was on a longer term and more personal quest than just my doctoral work. It is only after the fieldwork has finished that I can identify its continuing effect on me, but at the time I could indeed feel this community adoption working on my self-understanding. Apart from *amrit* there is no clear threshold of belonging in *Sikhi*, but the gossamer threads of instruction and friendship build surprisingly strong ties over time.

iii) Retirements

a) Interfaith

If there were awkward times I also had occasions of celebration, none more so than the separate conclusions of my interfaith work, stipendiary ministry, and Sikh fieldwork. It had long been my intention to retire from stipendiary ministry after 40 years, but I retired from the interfaith role a year earlier when the opportunity came to pass it on to someone with a national reputation in the field. We began, with the bishop's support, a handover that eventually took place in August 2016. A group of about 40 people from across the area and across faiths gathered for a farewell, with food, an open microphone for speeches, a display of photographs and a chance for people to write comments. I had a number of

comments to treasure, including those from my bishop who wrote of me as a 'trustworthy guide' in the world of interfaith, referring to my 'great energy, acumen and purpose,' and my having endeared myself to all through my gentleness and humility, building up 'huge reservoirs of trust and goodwill with all the faith communities as a result' (Appendix 6). I mention these tributes as something of a balance to the description of my shortcomings, and to indicate the sharpness of the contrast between this appreciated role and that of student and initiate, pointing up the challenges the latter had involved.

b) Parish

Ending my interfaith role gave me more time in the parish, and this last year was happy and fulfilling. On retirement the congregation generously invited people from my previous parishes to join them, arranging a Communion service and then a great tea party. The church was packed, every chair full and people sitting on the floor, with all the parishes where I had served represented, colleagues, Methodist and Anglican, and members of the family and the Pheasey community there as well. I presided at the Communion, and as I looked out it was like a near-death experience, faces from the previous 40 years mingled together, and an awareness of those 'upon another shore, and in a greater light' to use the gentle phrase for the dead that came to mind (Church of England 2006, 88). My stipendiary ministry ended with an event that cast a retrospective light of blessing and appreciation over the years, something to treasure; there are few occupations that lend themselves to forming such attachments, or to such resonant celebrations.

c) Gurdwara



Figure 33: The author using Chaur Sahib, GKN Gurdwara.

I had no expectations of the end of my fieldwork at the gurdwara. I had previously been invited to use *chaur sahib*, to do the fly-swatting seva over *Guru Granth Sahib Ji*, something that anyone can do, including little children, but which I still appreciated. The associate membership idea had petered out. I prepared to finish, letting people know as good ethnographic practice

DATE	DAY	TIME	PROGRAMME	NAME	ਸੰਗਰਾਹ
	MON	10 T 2	ਈਥੀਆਂ ਟਾ ਮੁਤਮੰਗ		ਹਾੜ
	TUE	2-4	GURBANI SANTHYA		
	WED				
	THU				
	FRI				
8-7-17	SAT	10 To 12	PATH SUKHMANI SAHIB & LANGAR		
9-7-17	SUN	10 To 12	PATH SUKHMANI SAHIB	JUN BARNETT	

Figure 34: Announcement of the author's Sukhmani Sahib, GKN Gurdwara.

and a courtesy to my hosts, but not expecting a response (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 94-96; O'Reilly 2009, 11-12). I asked Devsi what I could do to express my gratitude, and he recommended making a payment and asking for a prayer. I did this weekly but now it was decided the prayer would be the *Sukhmani Sahib* ('Jewel of Peace'), a blessing which takes a couple of hours.

Usually this is done for a significant family event, with the fee being £ 51,¹²¹ but people also pay for the food in the gurdwara as well, perhaps £ 500. £ 51 was manageable, £ 500 was not. Devsi discussed it with the committee and came back with the good news that they would like to pay it for me as a gift to mark my time with them. I expressed thanks, but insisted on paying the £ 51 as a sign of my appreciation. I realised how unusual this was when the kitchen manager asked me about paying for the food. I told her what had been arranged but she remained concerned until the president came over to reassure her. I never fully understood the financial arrangements but was not intended to, leaving me shielded from realising how generously I was being treated and the obligations to which this knowledge would have given rise.

Devsī had asked me to come early, so I was there for 9-30 a.m., while the gurdwara was still quiet. I paid my £ 51, and was again invited to go on *chaur sahib* duty, during which people were gradually filing in. I sat near the front next to Devsi rather than at the back as normal. The chants went on and I wondered at one point whether the prayers had started without me realising, but prompt at 10-00 the attention switched to the *takhar* where one of the *granthis* started to read. I had bought an English translation with which I tried to follow, but he finished well before I did (*Sukhmani Sahib* 2014). I found both the reading itself and my translation moving, feeling genuinely blessed. I was aware of Devsi sitting next to me and of how much I owed to him, and the general aura of generosity surrounding the event.

¹²¹ Going just beyond a round number is a Punjabi tradition explained as signifying a 'more than' approach to giving.

Considerable creativity had gone into dealing with this unprecedented relationship, so that the orbit of 'welcome visitor' had been altered not by my attempts to unsettle it but by their (and which individuals were 'they' was still not clear to me) generosity and inventiveness. I could hear people coming in as the gurdwara filled to its usual level of attendance, with men and women coming to greet me. The occasion was not entirely without hazard. As I sat there I let my foot touch the translation and Devsi urgently warned me against defilement of scripture, even if only an English version, and a friend who had noticed the faux pas brought me a small wooden bookstand to prevent it happening again. I was also achingly aware that I was sitting for the best part of four hours cross-legged, as normal prayers followed. Trying to maintain good posture and sit still got desperately uncomfortable, something which distracted from this most important spiritual and social event. However the good wishes surrounding me continued as the stage secretary uttered kind words and a *granthi* presented me with an orange scarf. Devsi then made a wide-ranging speech, concluding that *Sikhi* has a precious message for the world and he was delighted that I had come to find out about it and would be helping to spread it to others. He added that by now I knew more about *Sikhi* than many born Sikhs, and that I had got so engaged that I was considering taking *amrit*.

This sent me into confusion. I had previously ruled that out because it required denying Jesus. Devsi had replied that such a denial was not part of the original meaning of *amrit*, but I had not taken this as suggesting that I move

forward.¹²² In fact the life style of dawn prayers, teetotalism and adopting the five K's were not things I was considering doing. I was confused, and the short speech I had prepared got off to a sticky start as I had to deny that this was my intention and to reaffirm my loyalty to Christ as well as to the *sangat*. I denied any claim to expertise, saying that those who are born into *Sikhi* are the experts. I also picked up the theme of friendship, pointing out that both our masters greeted others with graciousness and saying that our competitiveness on their behalf is just a sign of *manmukh*.

I stumbled through my speech, one of thanks and appreciation for hospitality and engagement throughout the time, thanking Devsi in particular and making a presentation to him, again describing my position as a *Nanak panthi*, and explaining that not only had my fieldwork finished but that I had moved away so they would not see so much of me in future. It would have been possible to make a final break, but I realised I did not want to do so, nor to reject the many invitations to return. I hoped the strictures against ethnographers 'going native' did not apply to autoethnographers (O'Reilley 2009, 12). When we came to the prayers I was moved to hear my name mentioned not just once in relation to my own donation but several times, indicating that a number of people had asked for prayers for me, with accompanying donations. Afterwards we went through to the *langar* hall and many people came over to greet me, including the president who looked quite emotional. This had been a new experience, with, as usual,

¹²² On reading this Devsi recalled (which I did not) my asking 'If I want to take *amrit* who do I have to get permission from?' He added: 'You don't need permission from anyone, it's like an open university. I will not force people to become Sikh but I will welcome them. I can't just say 'he's a white man!' He's a Sikh and he has done the study. You don't just become by attending, you learn, even if born a Sikh.'

elements of uncertainty and of error, but mainly one for which I was very grateful, and I was now assured that they had appreciated my being with them.

B. Findings at this stage

i) This limited commitment had effect

My deliberately modest commitment to engagement with the gurdwara had an effect. It had affected them: they made clear that they appreciated my engagement and showed their affection for me; and it had affected me: although I now had the chance to make a break I did not do so. I felt bound to them, and to the Birmingham seva.

ii) Good outcomes do not require perfection

My engagement with gurdwara, interfaith, church and circuit had entailed many mistakes, most frustrating and a few, from my perspective, shaming. Although this was a professional scenario the blanket of friendship was cast over those mistakes at the points of valediction. Corrections and instructions can build relationships if received gratefully.

iii) There were parallels of celebration

All three celebrations looked back, sketched stories of success and happiness (though others could have been written), and offered encouragement and blessing in an uncertain future. From my perspective they felt like parts of one event. I was aware of the joy and responsibility of holding them together, as through me each shared in the celebrations of the other.

iv) Those born into faith are more likely to have a thick cultural experience.

This reflection came out of my rejection of Devsi's valedictory compliment comparing my knowledge with born Sikhs.

11. SEQUEL

The sequel unties the neat ending of the fieldwork, breaking the bounds of the story.

A) After fieldwork

i) Continuing Christian engagement

Retirement and the end of my fieldwork brings changes. My ethical permissions for research at gurdwara and church have run their course, and so I am no longer keeping field notes, and have switched to a new journal as a reminder of my changed status.

The most obvious change is that much of my experience of Christian worship was in a leadership role, something that Nvivo analysis demonstrated was a major concern when worshipping. I still attend Sunday worship and engage as much if not more than when leading. I have permission to officiate, and take services in local churches regularly, and a few for family and friends, and have engaged with local organisations for retired clergy. At present I am more aware of freedom than loss, but am waiting to see if that balance changes. My loyalties to the Christian faith and Church of England do not seem to have been damaged by my engagement with *Sikhi*. If anything they have been enhanced as it has led me to appreciate what Jesus has to offer in this area, and to expand my horizons as to how his (and Nanak's) own nature may hold a key to right interreligious relationships.

ii) Personal spirituality

It was often in summer holidays that my desire and space to pray was rekindled, but retirement has not so far had that effect, and private prayer, Christian and Sikh, has reduced. I have engaged in some intercessory prayer as a way of

relating to the problems of others, and have occasionally read the daily reading, *hukamnama*, from *Hariminder Sahib*, and, more regularly, the daily wisdom from the WCCM, but without consistency. Is this just taking a rest, or is there an unacknowledged depression underlying this inattentiveness, and if so does it come from retirement, or from spiritual confusion caused by MRP? I must entertain the latter possibility although I do not feel it fits. More positively in October 2017 I noted after looking after grandchildren that when I started I used to think 'what on earth are we going to do for six hours?' but that it goes just like that. There is a purity about the engagement and attention involved that may be more wholesome than the self-conscious stuff of deliberate meditation.

iii) Continuing Sikh engagement

As to my relationship with *Sikhi*, I chose a venue for *seva*, central Birmingham, which would be convenient when I retired, and have kept that as a regular Monday engagement. Finishing fieldwork has not affected my dealings with other volunteers or with clients. Friendships have grown as time passes, and I have my own regular role in the food line. I also still attend GKN gurdwara, but in view of the distance I only go monthly. An ethnographer would usually break away on finishing their fieldwork, but this has the autoethnographer's stamp of being an aspect of my own story, a story which ends in one way when I finish writing, in another, only on death or when memory of me has faded away. I have moved from researcher to participant in my own right, but the loss of frequency, attending once a month, seemed initially to loosen the relationship. After the first gap of three weeks people seemed busy about things of which I was no longer a part, though there were greetings. My belonging felt diminished, a sign of those 'mundane reasons' for reduced allegiance observable in religious life

(Chryssides 2014, 32). As to life-style I have started to eat beef again when it is given to me, though I find I never choose it.

In August 2017 I was invited to attend the opening of the new *darbar*. It is no bigger than the old hall, but it does include a screen at the front. It is laid out the same except for an alcove to the right at the front, and seems to be used for major programmes while regular meetings still happen in the old hall. I was struck by the quality of the carpets, very soft and springy under foot. The place was full, and while I was there the mayor, MPs and councillors gradually came in and were seated, some on chairs at the back. The ceremony wended its way through several speeches, most in Punjabi, some in English, with



Figure 35: The new darbar, GKN Gurdwara.

one councillor fluent (so far as I could tell) in both. Then there were presentations of engraved plates to the dignitaries, during which the stage secretary called me up ‘John Barnett,... who used to be an officer,’ the last said uncertainly. I went up with a mixture of emotions, but mainly embarrassment. As the ceremony continued I wondered why I had been troubled over something that once I would have taken in my stride. There was pleasure at being recognised in this way,

something I had not realised I still desired, but also a feeling that I was once again a visitor, no longer the student but also not one of the hosts. I was back to where I was before, either as a reversion, as though nothing had happened in between, or as a restoration, a sign that I had not lost anything in the journey but all had been gain. The feelings of loss and gain ran together and were equally strong.

iv) Imagining a friendship



Figure 35: Nanak and Jesus walking together, author's sketch.

Because of the inchoate nature of meditative experience I was in an unusually good position to follow the phenomenological path of moving from the concept-light sensation of friendliness in *simran* to performing the eidic intuition, equipping the sensation with form. In a holiday immediately after fieldwork I sought a literal image of the friendliness I had experienced, sketching Jesus and Nanak as friends, and writing fourteen short pieces, one each

morning, imagining them together with me at various points in their ministries. The sketch is dire, but it may be the first image of Jesus and Nanak relating to each other ever produced.¹²³ I trust it will not be the last.

¹²³ There are plenty of places where they are lined up in an identity parade of holy people, e.g. Sai Baba Mandir, Lonsdale Rd., Wolverhampton. *Let's Peace Together Our World* (Kainth, no date) has a line-up of faith leaders including Jesus and Nanak where mutual love is implied by a heart shape at each joining of hands, but the subjects are not otherwise relating.

As to the imaginative exercise

Our imagination is our mind working in ways that are creative and constructive, cognitive and interpretive [...], that make the absent present and distance of little consequence. (Austin 2014, 2)

Attention to the imagination is urgently needed where the churches 'seem to be becoming even more enclosed within their [...] dogmatic prescriptions and regulatory systems' (Austin 2014, 3). Such imagination is not just daydreaming but the world of inner vision which may be an instrument of God, seeking to make sense of experience, not being alien to reason but functioning differently (Austin 2014, 2, 4-5). Here it links the original sensation (pp. 129-130) to the theology that follows (pp. 182-198), and it gives warrant to that theology, for if theology is devoid of imaginative purchase its meaningfulness is suspect.

I used an Ignatian style of imaginative meditation not just to connect 'with ancient [gospel] events, but also [as] the event of direct contact with God' (O'Brien 2011, 14-15; Clooney 2010, 54). Such imagination operates as a 'controlled manufacture of certain feelings and emotions [...] a clearing out of old images and an intensely defined admission of the new', agitated by 'a mass of desire' (Clooney 2010, 54, quoting Barthes). There is a parallel with interreligious engagement which gives religious opportunities to the meditator 'who both uses and empties the imagination' (Clooney 2010, 54). Here I attempt not a parallel but an overlap, remembering the title of the last Ignatian exercise: *Contemplation to Attain Love* (Clooney 2010, 56). I include one example; others, together with notes on the production of the picture and the pieces, are attached (Appendix 9).

v) *Visit to Lalo*

Jesus and I are among a crowd that has gathered at the house of Lalo the carpenter. We were travelling with Nanak, but, like Mardana, are staying elsewhere rather than overburden Nanak's humble host. Nanak calls Jesus forward to meet Lalo, and I go too. The conversation soon shifts so that Jesus and Lalo are busy discussing the technicalities of carpentry, comparing notes on how things are done in their different cultures, as handed down by their respective fathers. Nanak is delighted by this technical conversation and happy to sit quietly, despite their occasionally offering us ways into the conversation. The friendship between Jesus and Nanak is an open one which is not threatened by other friendships but enjoys them.

I am aware that outside there is some jealousy, from the village landlord who feels shown up because Nanak chose to stay with Lalo rather than him; and this ties in with a distain among some of the onlookers who not only despise Lalo, but now place Jesus in the lower caste of the carpenters; no Brahmin then, not even, like Nanak, a trader. But that animosity is all outside the door. For us in the house there is a warm, friendly gathering with barriers being broken down, and the technical talk between Lalo and Jesus gives it a mood of settled domesticity. Holiness is rooted, friendly, practical, without effect. Being there reminds me of my *Ramgarhia* (carpenter) friends.

Clooney concludes his exploration of the parallel between the Ignatian

exercises and interreligious relations:

...it is not necessary to assert that God is immobile and unable or unwilling to respond to the new situation of multiple religious belongings...Even in our time and place, God still graciously enjoys the possibility of finding us where we are pleased to look for God. (Clooney 2010, 59)

vi) *Self-description revisited*

Moving house I had to register at the local doctor's and the form included the opportunity to identify my religion. I filled most of it in, including ticking the 'Christian (Anglican)' box, and wondered if I should have ticked the 'Sikh' box as well. It would seem presumptuous, bearing in mind my still very limited acclimatisation to *Sikhi* and how inappropriate it would seem to some religious purists and Punjabi nationalists, but against that was a counter-pull, a sense that

my relationships with GKN and the seva group, and to a lesser extent with *Sikhi* more widely, gave a thickness to my relationship I was loath to ignore. I forgot about it and handed the form in, but then had a keen sense that I had let down, betrayed even, my friends. When I went to book my introductory appointment the receptionist got my notes up on her screen, and I asked her if she would alter them to indicate my Sikh identity as well as the Christian one. I felt embarrassed doing this in a white suburban village, and with no sign of my *Sikhi* apart from a (trimmed) beard. 'There, that's done!' she said after a moment and anxiety was replaced by a peaceful exhilaration.

Two weeks later I renewed my registration at the university. There was a drop-down box for 'religion' in the equalities monitoring section, and there was no option to indicate MRP, just 'Christian', or 'Sikh', or 'any other religion', a reminder that MRP does not easily fit such statistical monitoring. I remembered the comments on my turban-wearing from the Jordanian student (p. 91). Institutions, like states and religious hierarchies, are more comfortable with monolithic religious descriptions, and evidence of MRP – sometimes MRP itself - is repressed.

B. Findings at this stage

i) Commitment is sustained socially

The main thing holding me in engagement with GKN and seva and thus with *Sikhi* in its outer manifestation is my social connection, loyalty to friends and the knowledge that I am expected, and that affects my church engagement too. It is thrown into sharp perspective by the current paucity of my private spiritual engagement, and is evident in my continued engagement after fieldwork.

ii) Other stake-holders in 'belonging to a religion'

People may be subtle in describing their own religion, but institutions by and large are not, and being threatened or confused by those subtleties, refuse to recognise them. This hides the extent of MRP and smaller faiths.

iii) Imagination

It is possible to give imaginative form to a sensation of inclusive friendliness in the relationship between Jesus and Nanak, and this invites theological reflection.

12. DISCUSSION

In this chapter fieldwork and reflection is situated: in religious studies of MRP and MRB; in the professional context; as an instance of PT; in dialogue with readers; and in relation to theology of religions. Before that an underlying issue, betrayal, is addressed.

A. The question of betrayal

i) Margalit

There may be readers who feel I have got off lightly in terms of criticism and that there are communities or individuals who would give MRP a very frosty reception, as publication of the thesis may yet demonstrate. I did not shy away from those in my circle who objected, but neither did I actively seek confrontation with strangers.

However I did have anxieties of my own, over divided loyalty rather than contradiction. The Church of England report *Multi-Faith Worship?* asked whether engagement can be a betrayal of one's own faith (Inter-Faith Consultative Group 1992, 32), and this was clearly on my mind when I drew from the bookshop shelf Margalit's *On Betrayal* (2017). He described betrayal as a matter of ethics, applying within pre-existing relationships, contrasted with morality which gives rise to general duties. Betrayal is 'ungluing the glue of thick relationships', its turpitude proportionate to the thickness of the relationship (Margalit 2017, 47-55). He took the archetypal thick relationships as those of family and friendship, to which other forms of betrayal including apostasy –betrayal of the religious community – and idolatry – betrayal of God – are analogous (Margalit 2017, 79, 233, 252). Betrayal need not be deliberately damaging. Recklessness can be

just as painful, as when a married person has an affair they hope but fail to keep secret (Margalit 2017, 111-112).

My MRP has not been secret, I had the approval of bishop, congregation, and the gurdwara involved, but while expressing a continuing loyalty to Jesus and to the church I now have another loyalty as well which could be viewed as recklessly ungluing the glue. Like the spy Fuchs, whose citizenship of the UK seemed compatible to working for the Soviet Union as a wartime ally, could contradictions emerge as circumstances change, meaning I am already delusional in believing the two loyalties to be compatible (Margalit 2017, 31-32)? Christians have not been persecuted by Sikhs, a context which would problematize a dual loyalty, but Sikhs have suffered at the hands of 'Christian' state and individuals; and it was awkward explaining myself to *Sant Nirankari*, *Ek Niwas* and *Ravidassi* friends, with their experience of Sikh hostility. The possibilities for MRP vary between different religious groupings, and vary with time and place as the social context changes.

My relationship to the Christian church is not only analogous to friendship or family but a thick relationship in its own right, incorporating friendships, loyalty confirmed on oath to a series of bishops, my family's church engagement, the provision of my livelihood, and my world-view. That thickness makes it a possible scenario for betrayal, a disloyalty compounded by underlying ingratitude. I have much for which to thank the church and carry Traherne's aphorism with me: '... all the business of Religion on GODS part is Bounty, Gratitude on ours ...' (Austin 1992, 127).

This unease would be a problem for suggesting to fellow DIFAs that MRP is a valuable experience, unless there is the possibility that unpicking the model

of monarchical supremacy is not a threat to the church but a potential blessing. Single loyalties are helpful in establishing social control, public profile and esprit de corps, but Miller (2013) puts the case for recognising religious duality in families as being beneficial for Judaism. The benefit is not institutional but spiritual, and this invites a wider theological reflection.

ii) A theological perspective on betrayal

Jesus Christ and Guru Nanak established a continuing channel of teaching through Peter and Guru Angad respectively to ensure their word and work continued after their mortal presence, but this is not the same as their seeking to establish new religions. For Evangelicals it is a commonplace that following Jesus is not a religion, something also explored by radical Protestants like Bonhoeffer (Clements 2010, 1). One way of understanding Jesus's teaching ministry is as the reclamation of the Father God from the religious authorities, and Guru Nanak's declaration that 'there is no Hindu, there is no Muslim' is usually understood as a challenge to the whole notion of religious identity before God;¹²⁴ he criticised religiosity so strongly that Christians have recognised parallels between him and his contemporary Luther (Hooker 2018, 7). It is possible that to follow Jesus or Nanak is not to give succour to religious institutions but to unsettle them in the light of the kingdom, and that this disruption is an act of higher loyalty (Phan 2017, 134). If this institutional challenge is spiritually beneficial to church and *sangat* I thereby avoid charges of betrayal and ingratitude by turning to the examples of Jesus and the gurus themselves.

As to idolatry, the jealous monotheistic claim parallels the lover's demand for a unique relationship, and Margalit affirmed love as a dyadic relation, seeing

¹²⁴ There is an alternative reading that no-one is truly following their own religion.

a ternary relationship in that context as betrayal (Margalit 2017, 70). However in his view friendship, the model being explored here, did not demand exclusivity, but may expand to mutual benefit (Margalit 2017, 70). This investigation is not an attempt to replace God with something else, the basis of idolatry, but to catch the experience of the one God unawares, to be surprised by God afresh. Bringing Indian and Semitic religions into relationship can move theology forward, calling forth a re-appropriation – and redirection - of one's own experience in response (Berger 1979, 184).

B. Feedback into religious studies of belonging

Throughout the fieldwork participation was constant while belonging fluctuated, producing the narrative tension. Would belonging to the gurdwara and *Sikhi* develop, and would belonging to the church, Beacon or Christianity more widely, diminish? The only answer is the story itself; I am delivering a 'narrative verdict'.¹²⁵ By varying the point at which the story stops, for example the findings at the end of different chapters, different 'conclusions' can be drawn, and, despite my pleasure at a positive outcome, I acknowledge that the happy ending of Chapter 10 is as arbitrary a finishing point (though selected at the start) as any other. Factors affecting the fluctuation of belonging include (with examples): -

- formal religious structures (amrit, gurdwara membership, Methodist ministers not being congregation members);

- social factors (language and cultural aspects at the gurdwara, unwritten expectations on circuit);

- passage of time (short posting at Beacon Church, the 'new place' arising at the gurdwara after seeming stuck);

¹²⁵ *Chief Coroner's Guidance No 17 (2016), pp. 7-9.*

my spirituality and way of engaging (acceptance of cognitive dissonance);
my circumstances (Peter's illness, retirement);
inherent attitudes of the religious groups (hospitality at the gurdwara,
mutual support at Beacon Church);
personal relationships (creative and accepting friendliness at church and
gurdwara, as shown in farewells);
chance (the tribunal engagement).

Along with the complexity of my belonging over time the position at the end of the period is not clear-cut, as demonstrated by the tick-box conundrum at surgery and university; a *Nanak panthi* is neither a proper Sikh, nor not-a-Sikh. Such fluidity and complexity of belonging is only just beginning to receive adequate attention in the literature;¹²⁶ even where belonging is problematized variants are regarded as static rather than fluctuating (Cornille 2015, 4). Indicators such as length of engagement, acquaintance with the group's practices and beliefs, the stage reached on a spiritual path, and organisational status within the group may all be related without being in alignment (Chryssides 2014, 29). In the face of this complexity 'system of reference', 'allegiance', 'affinities' or 'preferences' have been commended as descriptors alongside or instead of 'belonging' (Gravend-Tyrole 2011, 423-424).

A likely cause for oversimplification is the unreflected ease of cultural MRP, and the simplicity and potential privacy of 'taking refuge' where Buddhism is a second religion, both of which mask the nuances faced by someone making a

¹²⁶ Chryssides and Gregg are due to have published in September 2019 *The Insider/Outsider Debate: New Perspectives in the Study of Religion* Sheffield: Equinox; which is critical of previous discussions for their over-simple approach (Equinox Publishing 2018).

deliberate choice to engage with two enfleshed religious communities (Knitter 2013, 216; *Buddhism Beta* 2015). Such deliberate community-crossing is taking place however. Thompson gives examples of a Christian-Muslim, Redding, a Jewish-Christian, Mrantz, and Knitter, the Buddhist-Christian, to whom could be added the Hindu-Christian Hart (Thompson 2016, 53-54; Hart 2006). Any such combinations will require discernment, and will generate their own fruits and problems.

C. Professional reflection

i) Context

I have referred to the Church of England's call to caution over joining in the prayers of other religions, the warnings of the World Council of Churches in the context of a more positive approach, and Catholic encouragement to 'well-grounded Christians' to share in the spiritual riches of other religions (Presence and Engagement, no date a, 2; Jesudason, Rajkumar and Dayam 2016, 2-4; Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales 2010, 51). The advice of practitioners ranged from Chapman's clear warning against joining in prayer to Gaston's participation in Ramadan (Chapman 2007; Gaston 2009, 92). These variations point to a need for the subtlety and courage of professional practice rather than a rulebook.

Schön examined reflection in action in a number of different settings, neither reducing it to an easily learned technical skill nor to the mysterious priestcraft of an elite (Schön 1982, 5, 50). Professional wisdom arises from experience, from implicit understandings and from experimentation (Schön 1982, 53-70). It needs to take into account the wider social context and is unlikely to

produce an off-the-shelf solution, requiring a form of reflection that does not paralyse action (Schön 1982, 187-188, 137-138, 277-278).

With my retirement I have ceased to be an active DIFA but my approach is that of a participating associate, experimenting on former colleagues' behalf and encouraged by the interest they have shown, rather than that of a complete outsider offering advice. The marginal nature of the DIFA in institutional terms and my own retired liberty combine to allow me a more creative approach than merely adjusting my cognitive structure to accommodate what is given, as in some reflective models (Moon 2004, 30). I am free to pursue a vision in a 'holistic response to the command to choose life,' doing this not in the spirit of criticism of others but of offering my own decisions and experience for judgement by my peers (Johns 2007; Palmer 1990, 143).

Towards the end of my fieldwork (in May and July 2017) I convened two focus groups with DIFAs and others in related roles or interests, including some with regional roles and one non-Anglican. Each group was composed of four people and myself and the discussions both extended well over the hour for which I had asked. One group was composed entirely of older men, the other was more mixed in age and included two women. All were white British. Both groups knew each other beforehand and the atmosphere was relaxed, frank and consensual.

Focus groups work when participants feel comfortable, respected and free to give their opinions without being judged. The intent of the focus group is to promote self-disclosure among participants. (Krueger and Casey 2015, 4.3)

This intent was balanced by the need to protect participants, so requests to edit the text were all complied with, and individual speakers have not been identified. I shared my research interest and then asked about any experiences they may

have had of joining in the worship of other religions, and their reflections. Participants did offer intellectual comment, but there was also recollection of emotion, contra criticism of focus groups, and the following points emerged (Krueger and Casey 2015, 7.1, 7.2).

ii) Response in focus groups

a) Sometimes attendance at non-Christian worship was worthwhile purely as a sign of fellowship without the need for prayerful participation –

I think going to [the]... mosque I am going there as an empathetic presence, mostly [...] I sit in my dog-collar right at the back trying to say [...] 'I want to show that I am on your side and we are all people of faith.'

b) Christians were sometimes caught up in non-Christian worship –

I share and feel that I am caught up in the yearning for God which is being expressed through whatever form, and that can be Hindu pilgrims walking in and throwing butter-packs at the statue [...] seeing the Torah being taken in procession and the desire to touch it, and the Islamic music and the call to prayer. For me there is something really profound, really moving about that.

I feel I am caught up in it [Muslim worship] even though I am stood at the back, and I am so impressed by the atmosphere.

some of the most profound moments I have had have been listening to [...] Sufi music ...

It's not that I believe in Hindu doctrines... but the worship feeds me...it's something to do with the atmosphere.

c) This gave rise to self-questioning -

...but then that's me psychologically or empathetically feeling at home with this, but is that quite the same as saying that theologically?

If you are taking a Christian perspective do you have to pray with the words 'through Christ our Lord'?

d) A sense of restraint as a Christian moderated engagement –

I am also conscious of my own Christian identity and therefore in a sense I feel it is incumbent on me to be slightly separate from that.

I am trying to be open to what aspect of God the people who are worshipping are being open to...But I think...how far can you do that?

e) The roles of participant and reserved observer could oscillate or be experienced simultaneously –

You find yourself at one stage as a participant caught up in it and at other stages, in fact in minutes sometimes, as an observer, and I think it oscillates between the two so often. ...Empathy is the word, not sympathy but real empathy.

...if I can have a refereeing analogy you may see something going on but then you are concentrating on the game, and then later on you say 'I saw that...' It's going with the flow but also realising that there is something going on in one's own mind... trying to work out what is going on in my own relationship with God.

f) Discernment looked for the Christ-like -

The crunch point is: does Jesus have to be named as 'Jesus' or can it just be the Word?

If you say 'in the name of Jesus' that means 'this is a prayer Jesus would have prayed.' ...If it ties in with the Lord's Prayer I am happy to say 'amen' to it.

g) Discernment was holistic, drawing on prior knowledge of the religion concerned, especially where there was a language issue -

I don't know any Punjabi or Gurmukhi ... but I read the *Guru Granth Sahib* [Ji] in translation [and] a lot of it reminds me of the Hebrew prophets; I feel there is an awful lot in common... and therefore if you are there in the gurdwara and hearing that singing you know it is that kind of praise that is going on, even if you don't understand a word of it.

I don't understand Arabic but the language isn't a barrier, you can sometimes detect a pattern of where you are, where you're going.

I will pray but I don't pray the liturgy probably, because I don't understand it.

...that smidgeon of Punjabi that I have enables me to join in with those prayers of intercession with the good Lord being asked to support Mrs So-

and-so who is going in for a hospital appointment, and I am thinking ‘yes I’m there with you.’

However another participant commented -

Where I personally struggle to engage with worship is if I am in a context where I don’t understand the language and therefore it is hard to maintain focus for a long time...if I can’t join in the corporateness of it I start to disengage.

h) Actions drew forth special consideration -

Being asked to put a garland on Gandhi I think: ‘well, fine, this may not be what I normally do, but clearly it would be impolitic to refuse and I don’t actually have a problem with this.’

I would not go and join a line of prayer but I would quite happily pray to God in my own head.

If someone gave me an *aarti*¹²⁷ plate I would quite happily move my hands over the flames because I understand the theology behind it.

I think I would distinguish very much between joining in the five times daily prayers *salat*¹²⁸ standing on the end of the line, I have never considered doing that because that is a bit like somebody from another faith participating in the Eucharist. It is the thing that shows the identity of that faith...

...they wanted me to bathe the Buddha. I felt very unhappy doing that. One of the reasons was that they expected me to do that and I felt that I was being forced into a situation that I was not comfortable with as a representative of the Christian Church.

Where they all start doing *puja*¹²⁹...they say ‘no you don’t want one of these’... and you think ‘fine, that’s your choice you made for me. I’m not getting into an argument about that.’

¹²⁷ Hindu fire ritual where a plate with burning wicks is brought to each devotee.

¹²⁸ Muslim devotional liturgy oriented toward Mecca.

¹²⁹ Hindu prayer ritual.

i) Images were not presented as a problem -

A German friend of mine talked in terms of '*überseern*', [...] we would use the term 'to see through,' and I was able to relate to the meaning of the image rather than the image per se.

I think it's very similar when going to benediction and you have the host and you are seeing Christ as somehow present in that bread, and you say that for the Hindus God is somehow present in that image, and being empathetic to that and maybe to bow towards that image and be respectful towards it realising that it's a little face of God.

j) Worship participation was reduced when exercising public roles as Christian representatives, particularly leading groups. This was motivated by, and had consequences for, relationships -

I would never join with their [Sufi] group when they are meeting publicly, they meet in a church, because I think it creates an issue for me in terms of my identity. I am very happy to join in privately and I get caught up in the meditation they practise and share it with them, but I would be very wary about doing it publicly.

If I took a group... to a mosque we wouldn't in any way join in... for me personally it's more complicated if I am the sole person.

I will often not receive [*karah parshad*] as a sign that it's fine not to...

The Sikh guide will normally say 'I'm going to bow to *Guru Granth Sahib* [Ji] out of respect, you don't have to but you can,' leaving it to other people, but because I'm meant to be this almost neutral guide and facilitator I deliberately don't bow, but if I was going on my own I would sit and I would sing maybe.

It might be their first experience of a different place of worship, a Christian, and they are so terrified by what they might encounter... so that if I started to participate they would freak out even more.

The only other role that I'm really cautious with apart from my own role is if I was taking members of the congregation from [my spouse's] church...I worry a lot of people may have a problem with me worshipping in a Hindu context.

On the other hand, role or the needs of the group could lead to more engagement rather than less -

If you are the chaplain or something, then to a certain extent you have to embrace and engage with and help people who are not of your tradition. We talk about it with the group beforehand, and say 'only do what you're comfortable with', but if the leader doesn't do it then in a way that inhibits those who want to do it. I can see exactly what you mean [in not participating] but you can play it either way.

k) Both focus groups independently and unprompted raised the alienation arising in Christian worship, sometimes more than with other faiths -

Can I be provocative and say the only group I feel uncomfortable with are certain kinds of Christians? I feel if you know you're a visitor in another faith, that relaxes you because if there is something going on you're not quite sure of you're not being expected to be committed to that, whereas if you go into some Christian environments you feel that whoever is leading it or the people round about you expect you to be committed to that and you're not, that's when I feel uncomfortable.

I would want to bring in other Christian worship here as part of that spectrum because when one goes to Roman Catholic mass in this country I am trying to pray but conscious that I am not fully part of it, and similarly if I go to an evangelical church with bands and what have you again I am trying to be present, I am trying to be empathetic but it really isn't my tradition so there is a limit to how I can actually engage. Then one goes to a synagogue and I feel much more at home, especially with the psalms, and even if the psalms are being sung in Hebrew I can follow the psalms in the book as though I am saying the office at home.

Some of the prayers I hear in a Christian context, we had an ecumenical gathering where [...] some of the things that were being prayed for I felt profoundly this is not a prayer Jesus would have prayed and I cannot say 'amen' to this.

l) Issues of theology of religion were addressed in different ways; any agreement in practice did not come from a homogeneity of theological perspective -

...'they are all wrong and we are all right'... unless you are going to take that [Christian] perspective... it's a challenge to you. So the theological questions pile up.

The engagement with other scriptures can help us appreciate our own scriptures. ...when we engage with other scriptures there are echoes of our own scriptures in our minds and then we have echoes of those scriptures when we engage with ours.

I tend to analyse my response to human nature and my response to what's going on very much through a mixture of Sikh and Christian eyes...I found myself...within the sermon using Sikh texts.

The other is there to challenge me but not just to challenge me, it's actually to draw me out, and I think there is a sense in my identity that actually grows and is enriched by facing the different.

I went to a Christian ashram and it turned out that actually what I thought it was about Hindu worship that attracted me so much...actually existed in Christianity and I had no idea.

I am increasingly of the opinion that we all have our different narratives and it is the way of expressing our identity, but in the end there is a sense in which collectively we are yearning for the same.

With Buddhism it is perfectly within reason to be able to view one's life with a foot in both camps.

...people assume that because I'm very happy to partake in Hindu worship then I'm a pluralist. If I pigeon-hole myself into a particular box it wouldn't be that one. It's not that I believe in any Hindu doctrines, I don't believe in reincarnation if you like, or in karma, but the worship feeds me, but that certainly doesn't mean I would describe myself as a Hindu-Christian...

iii) Reflections

Among interfaith colleagues I was aware that I had taken a step a number of them would have hesitated over in joining in Sikh worship, but none condemned it, and most acknowledged that they had prayed in non-Christian places of worship without being entirely clear whether that prayer was exclusively Christian or not, something I had experienced myself and recognised from those from Beacon Church who visited GKN. Most focus group members had held back from full participation in worship of another faith, by gesture or mental

reservation, restrained for doctrinal reasons or in their specific role as interfaith advisers (or a lecturer on religions). It was the first time any focus-group members had engaged in sustained discussion of the issue and they were not confident in the discernment involved.

Whether participation is just a matter of empathy or psychology (c)¹³⁰ is tied up with this issue of discernment, both as reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action (Schön 1982). This discernment is Christ-focussed¹³¹ but not Christian-limited, with the key question concerning compatibility with the teachings and examples of Jesus (f),¹³² a holistic judgement which takes into account the adviser's fullest breadth of knowledge and experience (g). Christians need to be well-grounded in their own faith, and have real – however modest - knowledge of the community on which they are seeking discernment. This discernment draws less on theology of religions and more on comparative theology, moving away from the generalised concept of religion¹³³ and towards the complexity of lived religion with its multiplicity of beliefs and practices (Fredericks 1999). This is borne out in the focus groups (k) by their experience that some Christian worship was not only less appealing but discerned as less true to Jesus than some worship of other religions.

‘We should stop theorizing about non-Christian religions and start learning about them [...] based on the innate attractiveness of their actual beliefs and religious practices,’ ‘an encounter which should not leave a Christian

¹³⁰ Letters in brackets refer to the paragraphs in pages 170-175 above.

¹³¹ Except for one contributor, a Christian Buddhist, for whom the focus of discernment was ethical.

¹³² Acknowledging the pluriformity of those teachings and examples in scripture and traditions.

¹³³ An idea to which Fredericks clings, and to which I will continue to refer to avoid confusion, but recognising the conceptual problems it carries with it.

unchanged,' as well as providing a 'useful way to disagree with honesty and depth' (Fredericks 1999, 10, 175, 177-178). This is something DIFAs are already doing, but encouragement and support should be available for those who wish to do so in a more purposive and open way. Those with whom I was speaking did not feel that they had the confidence of the wider church in any cross-religious prayer, and that making public these unsought individual experiences risked distressing, angering or confusing other Christians (j).

In response I would say that becoming involved in the worship of other religions is not a minor or regrettable by-product of interfaith work but a significant gift to the church. The engagement of DIFAs, often in part-time roles or with no allocated time at all, and circumscribed by the conventions of church life, may not seem much, but few others in the UK take part in cross-religious activity with the Christian rootedness and the professional wisdom of my former colleagues, and the call to 'share [...] spiritual riches, e.g. regarding prayer' is one few are better equipped to follow than them (Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales 2010, 51).

Dupuis invited the church to reflect 'on the concrete experience of the pioneers who have relentlessly endeavoured to combine in their own life their Christian commitment and another faith experience' (Phan 2003, 507). The Church should show a welcoming acceptance that some DIFAs engage deeply with the religions of others so that they can develop their discernment and offer more engaged advice. This research seeks to flex a perceived boundary, and its publication will be a further experiment as any reaction could make it either easier or harder for DIFAs to acknowledge participation in other religions. Such participation is not a niche matter but is important for the nature of Christian

identity and how it may re-form in the decades to come. Will it become a commonplace that some other religions harmonise with or offer an enhancing counterpoint to aspects of Christianity, and that this is not a threat but an encouragement, not to be shied away from but celebrated?

Specific professional benefits have arisen from my research experience –

a) It has raised the whole issue of spiritual discernment, not exhausted by discovering and abiding by religious boundaries, but calling for more subtle judgement, piercing between joints and marrow (Hebrews 4:12). This is something which a DIFA needs to hone because she should be able to offer help in this to others.

b) It has brought to the surface the issue of prayer with other faiths as a complex relationship, sometimes Christian but in another faith setting, sometimes a partnership in prayer, sometimes no longer distinct from the prayer context in which it is taking place. Prayer can be both the guardhouse of particularity and the gateway of solidarity. DIFAs need their advice to match this fluid reality.

c) It has brought into focus the lives of that growing number of people who live across religions, noted by the Church of England's General Synod and likely to give rise to situations where DIFAs are expected to offer advice (Presence and Engagement 2017).

These are all reasons why DIFAs should relate to the worship of another religion at greater depth than the scattergun visits necessary for retaining a wide range of contacts allows. Circumstances, theology and personal inclination will all affect how colleagues approach such boundary-crossing, but I encourage

them to be more intentional in such steps, and the church to support such initiatives and hear what is reported back.

iv) A case in point

In 2007 Redding, an Episcopalian priest for 23 years with a doctorate from Union Theological Seminary, announced that she had been called by Jesus to make the *shahada*, the Muslim testament of faith, and now considered herself fully Muslim as well as fully Christian. Her interim bishop said that he accepted her as an Episcopalian priest and a Muslim and found the interfaith possibilities exciting (Shah 2017). When a new diocesan bishop was appointed, however, Redding was inhibited, and eventually deposed ('defrocked') as the bishop did not believe a priest of the church could be both Christian and Muslim, despite finding Redding a woman of utmost integrity and their conversations open, honest and respectful (Tu 2009). The legal sticking point was Redding having being admitted into a religious body not in communion with the Episcopal Church, but priests who become Quakers or even those who take refuge as Buddhists have not been so sanctioned. A traditionalist commentator on the bishops' responses, said of the Episcopalian church 'we are internally incoherent on a massive scale' (Tu 2009). Perhaps if either bishop had been a practical theologian they might have, Gamaliel-like, said rather: 'My initial reaction is that I [accept/cannot accept] Redding's position, but recognising the growing significance of MRP, and her own ministerial maturity, theological acumen and integrity, the church will seek to learn from her about the possibilities and difficulties as they unfold rather than foreclosing in judgement' (Acts 5:38-39). There was no excommunication, suggesting her sanction was role-related, and her position would have been tolerable for a lay-person. If Redding's role was that of a bishop's DIFA, tasked

with exploring interreligious relationships, a restrained but attentive episcopal response would have been even more appropriate.

D) Feedback into PT

i) Non-Christian theology

This thesis continues the trend of PT towards working with non-Christian theology.¹³⁴ Although it is now agreed that PT can have other religious sources than Christianity, how non-Christian or partially Christian frameworks of belief are appropriated requires further exploration. Here there is the complexity of applying two different theologies, Christian and Sikh, with an asymmetry as to both the amount and the degree of explanation provided, with the presumption of a reader versed in Christianity but not *Sikhi*. This may be a useful model for other authors, or lead to further discussion within the discipline as to its appropriateness.

ii) Use of narrative

Bringing together the three fields of action, reflection and theory into a properly balanced account is a current concern of PT (Bass *et al.* 2016). The approach offered here is based on recognising that those aspects have a shared chronology, at least for authors, as evidenced in research journals, and this time-flow opens the way for narrative to keep the three factors together. The pattern they form has sometimes varied from the actual experience in pursuit of coherence, but representing the passage of time in an overarching narrative is more accurate than their artificial segregation and atemporal presentation, and allows for significant events that challenge the constraining elements of theory or plot to find a place.

¹³⁴ Though 'non-Christian theology' is a problematic concept (Murphy 2017).

Not only the experience but the writing has changed me. Writing gave me stability at times of stress and kept me alert to the possibility of change at times of stasis, and the creativity that has inevitably accompanied description, a poesis of hope, has developed my boldness.

The narrative imagination, engaged in the project of re-writing the self, seeks to disclose, articulate, and reveal the very world which, literally, *would not have existed* had the act of writing not have taken place. (Freeman 1993, 223, his italics)

iii) Use of self-questionnaire

This produced an interesting longitudinal comparison. If I did this again I would take care to define the questions more sharply, and consider asking myself for brief explanatory comments. It is time for the prejudice which resists anything that looks like quantitative research to be questioned, so long as the suggestion that a quantitative format makes evidence more reliable is rejected.

E) Responses from readers

The responses from the twelve readers were overwhelmingly positive (they were coming from friends) as to the importance of the subject, the engaging approach, and the readability of the thesis. The representatives of the two communities with which I was engaged accepted what I had said about them, and those who had accompanied me as collocutors were satisfied with the representations of our discussions, although Devsi made the amendments recorded. There was significant concern from academic readers (including colleagues) as to the divergence of this piece from their expectations for a PhD, something I addressed by rewriting and extending the introduction and some link pieces as well as extending the theological context offered (pp. 8-13, 28-31), and there were suggestions for further reading, most of which I took. Colleagues reacted to the

piece as academic rather than professional writing and did not comment directly on the challenge to DIFAs to cross boundaries more boldly, although both focus groups had shown considerable engagement with the issue. Is there something about an academic format, even when discussed among working colleagues, which disconnects from professional reflection?

My supervisor had at one stage commented that reading of my mistakes gave rise to a sense of embarrassment for me, something which struck me as one of those distracting emotions against which autoethnography must guard (Méndez 2013, 284). I left the reports of my mistakes, but altered the self-depreciating style in which they were described and added reference to my bishop's encomium to give a more balanced view of my competence. I asked the readers about any feelings the piece had aroused in them but no-one raised this issue.

There were many individual suggestions for improvement or extension, and all comments except straight-forward proof reading are to be found in Appendix 10, along with notes of how I responded, as an exercise in transparency.

F) God's friendliness as theological method

There had been a phenomenological progression from the sensation of friendliness in *simran* recognised in February 2017 through the Ignatian-based work on the imagination of friendships in September 2017 towards this theoretical work required for theological coherence.

i) Context of friendship

In dealings with the gurdwara gatekeepers and in my pastoral style at Beacon Church friendship was essential to my professional practice and significant for my research. This was an aspect of autoethnography at a

communal as well as individual level, in which relationships needed to be prioritised and nurtured and any conflicts between those and the research addressed, it increased obligations to confidentiality, loyalty and a dialogical approach to writing, and meant that some relationships have been maintained after the research was finished (Adams, Jones and Ellis 2015, 60-62). These elements have mitigated the utilitarian approach to friendship which was inevitably present in my research (Moore 2009, 15).

Friendship is not just an aspect of practice and research method however, but has developed as a theological theme. I make no claim that this is the only theological reflection that could arise from MRP or that there is a necessary link, but these reflections on friendship, a subject I had originally dismissed as lacking theological substance, arose directly from my experience in worship, giving confidence that other theological thought could also be stimulated by MRP and suchlike boundary-exploring initiatives.

ii) Friendliness and friendship

This theological investigation considers both friendliness and friendship, distinguishing between them as it does so. *Friendliness* is taken to be an individual's (or community's) approach to the world marked by openness, thinking well of others, interest in them, and vulnerability to rebuff or exploitation. It is open to forming *friendships*, but to do so requires reciprocity and is subject to discernment, prioritisation, and change, though it may sometimes reach unchangeable commitment. The relationship between them is subtle. Friendliness without any actual friendships would be either superficial or tragic, friendships without more general friendliness is the stuff of divisive cliques. An attitude of friendliness is not reserved for friends themselves, indeed it is more

clearly demonstrated to strangers or mere acquaintances. Friendship goes beyond friendliness in its potential for major impact on people's lives.

iii) A theology of friendship

Most titles of Jesus – 'Saviour', 'Lord' - relate to imbalance of power and hierarchy, implying distance. 'Friend' is an underexplored descriptor, there in scripture where Jesus described himself as a friend of his followers and was described by others as a friend of tax-gatherers and sinners, a title he seemed to accept (Moltmann 1979, 54-56; John 15:15; Matthew 11:19).

Jesus, the incarnation of God in the world, demonstrated how friendship is the most godlike relationship that human beings can have with one another. He offered friendship to men, women and children, to social outcasts and foreigners. (Kerney 2007, 38)

Friendship is contrasted unfavourably with love by some, *philia* as against *agape*, with *philia* being seen as secondary because it is preferential rather than universal, based on mutual need, subject to change, can lead to injustice in civic life, and is in tension with vocation, so that we cannot simply 'rest content in a partial, particular love like friendship' (Meilaender 1985, 105). However friendship was once seen as an open relationship with roots in civic relations of mutual protection and assistance, and only later privatised to refer to personal intimacy, and it could still be a model for public policy and practice in many contexts: families, marriages, church communities, neighbourhoods and nations (Moltmann 1979, 61; McFague 1987, 178; Kerney 2007).

Aelred claimed that in friendship there is no hierarchy, a startling claim for an abbot, near the apex of both feudal and spiritual authority, to make, and he specifically extended this to gender issues (Aelred 2010, 66; McFague 1987, 159). Aelred affectionately exposed the characters of his perhaps fictitious

proponents: timid Ivo, irascible Walter, eager-to-please Gratian, the over-stretched abbot, showing awareness and respectful allowance for the shortcomings of all concerned, for true friendship is a place where the shadow side is received and accepted, one allows one's friends to be, just the way they are (Dutton 2010, 34-37). Aelred made clear the need for discernment in developing a friendship, but once developed he advocated sticking with it 'as long as a glimmer of hope for improvement remains' (Aelred 2010, 102-106).

iv) Friendship in Sikhi

If a person were to come at midnight and mention the name of Baba Nanak, however unfamiliar he may be, say even if he were a thief [...] they would look upon him as a brother and a friend. (Dhillon 2012, vi, quoting Vaswani)

Nanak was described as being accompanied during much of his 23 years of journeying by two boyhood friends, the musician Mardana, a Muslim, and Bala, a Hindu, friendships which crossed caste as well as religious lines. The relationship with Mardana was described thus -

[they] had a similar build. When strangers saw them together, they often mistook them for brothers. Mardana had always been a carefree, happy-go-lucky child; his lack of seriousness and garrulousness were a perfect foil to Nanak's quiet, introverted nature. (Dhillon 2012, 22)

Mardana's continuing hunger led him into scrapes that provided light touches in the tales of the journeys, but his music was a serious contribution to Nanak's mission and later Sikh life (Dhillon 2012, 70; Singh, G. 2014, 399).

God is named in the *Mool Mantra* as *Nirvair*, without enmity, and there are several names by which God is invoked which imply friendship in *Guru Granth Sahib Ji*, as well as injunctions on the subject (Dhillon 2015, 137-138). There are limitations on dealings with Muslims and sectarian Sikhs and no friendship possible with evil forces, but the Sikh way of life is one by which 'friendship with

the Divine and fellow human beings is a cherished value' such that union with the supreme reality allows for no hostility (Dhillon 2015, 142; Nesbitt 2015, 121-122). *Sikh*'s sense of friendship has been credited with its development of support for human rights and equality generally (Juss 2010, 280). It is a continuing feature of Sikh life -

When I asked [Devsī] about friendship ... he told me ... about three friends of his grandfather's generation whose living together in [...Lahore had created such a bond that, even though their families were scattered at partition], their children have remained close down the generations, regarding each other as cousins, and that had come out of friendship.

v) *Friendship with the Divine*

Aquinas saw friendship with other humans and the angels as signs of the paradisiac friendship we will all share with God: 'any friend of God's is a friend of mine' (Moran 2018, 18). Aelred developed this, distinguishing spiritual friendship from the carnal and the worldly as desired for its own sake; it is the human image of God's characteristic unity, and is God's greatest gift to humankind, leading to the eucharistic embrace:

...sometimes suddenly, imperceptibly, affection melts into affection, and somehow touching the sweetness of Christ nearby, one begins to taste how dear he is and experience how sweet he is. (Aelred 2010, 126, translator's italics)

To be attuned to Jesus as friend is to enter an 'utterly non-rivalistic creative power', which offers no traction to the Satanic, but an 'astonishing gentleness' (Alison 2003, 1, 14, 16). The Spirit of God 'can move and re-create us without displacing us,' all this through God's liking for us, a word which has none of the overtone of forceful intervention with which Christians have freighted the word 'love,' and does not imply dependence although it is sustaining (Alison 2003, 143, 15; McFague 1987, 165, 167). The intimacy of friendship has generated some

striking interpretations of the relationship with God, including a developmental approach moving from honeymoon through a 'warts and all' phase of acceptance of strains, to a time of family-like collaboration (Barry 2008, 8). God is intimately present to the human shadow side and even wickedness, something that provokes compassion for God, presumptuous outside the bonds of friendship (Barry 2008, 124). We 'use God,' in the context of friendship, having the right perspective that our abilities are our friend's gifts; and accepting God's friendship leads to our own openness and caring (Walsch 199, 227-228; McFague 1987, 176-177).

In *Sikhi* despite the issue over whether God has attributes the devout can still have friendship: 'I have befriended only the one God: I love only the one God. | Yea, the one alone is my constant companion and friend,' he can be experienced as 'the best companion, closer than family' (*Sri Guru Granth Sahib English Version* 1960, 958; Nesbitt 2015, 123). This friendship is strengthened and made effectual by friendship with those who are themselves under the influence of the gurus (*Sri Guru Granth Sahib English Version* 1960, 1421).

vi) Problems with friendship with the Divine

a) Friendship and lordship

Claims of friendship may be felt to diminish the authority of God, but, as with Aelred's monastic authority, divine authority is bracketed rather than denied in the context of friendship. This realisation helped with the issue of submission that had troubled me in discussions with Stobert and in one of the focus groups. Friendship may give the opportunity to flout the authority of a superior, but it takes away the desire. Paul addressed a similar issue over the possibility of taking advantage of grace, demonstrating that this was not a problem specific to the

friendship model but to any approach that rested on the generosity and mercy of God (Romans 6:14-15.).

b) The shadow side.

I have dwelt on the friendliness of Jesus and Guru Nanak indicated in scripture, and in the *janam-sakhi* and *Guru Granth Sahib Ji*, but more divisive and judgemental scriptural presentations of Jesus' lordship and messages from the writings of the gurus can be construed as well (Pattison 2007a). I acknowledge these, but in the reciprocity of friendship choose to recognise these factors only in a wider more amiable context and so do not dwell on them. Working through aggression in the context of friendship can lead to clearer understanding and even a greater affection 'since we love people for their faults [or challenges] as well as their virtues' (May 1998, 151-152). Christianity and *Sikhi* both invite devotees to regard with love the all-powerful maker and sustainer of mortal existence despite the terrors and evils of that existence and our sense of being under judgement. The resilience of friendship may provide a better framework for this tension than the dry certainties of systematic theodicy: 'although he causes grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love' (Lamentations 3:32).

c) Divine perfection

If coping with one another's shortcomings is not just an effect of friendship but a creative element, the purported perfection of the divine is as much an obstacle to friendship as any shadow side. However, if Jesus is our friend and so covers our shortcomings, so we in turn may cover (without needing to reject) his

perfection, recognising it as at least as unsettling to the equality of true friendship if constantly emphasised (Psalm 32:1).

vii) Interreligious friendship

These features of divine friendship can be brought into the interreligious context: loss of hierarchy, acceptance of shadow side, covering of perfection, non-rivalistic creative power, compassion for God, and helping God in a way that would otherwise be presumptuous, and they all throw the competitive aspect predicated on divine leaders, and with it the desire to replace other religions, into disarray.

Friendship is understood in similar ways in different cultures; experience of cross-cultural friendship reduces the subsequent need for similarity of lives and experiences in forming further friendships; and friendships grow through a number of different types of shared activity including ritual (used in a non-religious sense) (Galupo and Gonzalez 2013; Lee 2006). Difference is not necessarily an obstacle to friendship in scripture and in the example of Jesus, and it has been described from a Sikh point of view as an aspect of 'transformation by integration (not simply through encounter)... vital to one's spiritual life' (Volf and McAnnally-Linz 2015; Nesbitt 2015). Devsi told me that his most longstanding friends in Britain are a Muslim and a Hindu.

There was hostility between Jesus and the authorities of his faith, Judaism, but that relationship is an unsatisfactory model for Jesus' dealings with Nanak.¹³⁵ These second-order upholders of the institution have an important religious role, but it is different from that of religious founders such as Jesus and Nanak. Jesus had dealings with only one holy-man religious founder, John the Baptist, and his

¹³⁵ And even there Jesus begins in mutuality and discussion (Luke 2: 41-51).

reaction is one of submission that 'probably signified Jesus' commitment to John's cause and expressed his agreement with his message,' something about which later Christian writers are 'clearly embarrassed' (Mark 1:1-11; Tuckett 2001, 87). Although John's apocalyptic style was different from Nanak's his message to tax collectors and soldiers to work honestly and his challenge to religiosity are as close to Nanak's message as to Jesus's (Luke 3:7-14).

It is harder to distinguish between holy men (and women) and religious leaders in Nanak's milieu and he had his confrontations with the latter, e.g. in his refusal of the thread ceremony *yagnopavitam*. However his dealings with the *pirs*, Islamic saints, of Multan, demonstrated his capacity for turning confrontation into friendship. As he approached the town they sent him a bowl of milk, filled to the brim, signifying that the town had enough holy men and there was no room for him. Nanak took a jasmine petal and balanced it on the surface of the milk, a sign his presence would not displace but adorn them, and so it proved as they allowed him in and he won them over with his gentleness and humility (Dhillon 2005, 98-99).

Interreligious friendship is an elastic concept, a goal in itself but also an invitation to learning, including self-understanding and a recognition of transcendence; it 'finds its fullest expression in [being] consciously grounded in God, or in the ultimate reality' (Goshen-Gottstein 2015, 172). Friendship is seen as the aim of scriptural reasoning rather than just enabling it, and can arise out of dialogue (Ford 2006, 348; Lambert 2001, 11). Interreligious friendship can be a cause of anxiety for conservatives, or presented as a safe alternative to deeper religious engagement, or understood as an implicit contradiction to a judgemental faith (Smith 2007, 22; Chapman 2007, 23-25; James 2015, 58). It

can be used in Christian evangelism,¹³⁶ arousing Sikh distrust (Gidoomal and Wardell 1996; Goshen-Gottstein 2015, xxxvii). It can be a matter of Christian vocation, as for Merton whose original doctrinal boundaries were challenged by a 'vocation of unity,' and can have a sacramental aspect as an experience of grace and a foretaste of eternal joy (Apel 2006, xix, 137; Vento 2015). For Sikhs it can be seen as a part of that transformation by integration which is vital to spiritual life (Nesbitt 2015, 118).

McLaren explored interreligious friendship through an imaginative exercise in which he asked if Jesus, Muhammad, Moses, the Buddha – and he drew in Guru Nanak and others – would compete when they met, or would reach out their hands in friendship and embrace, being drawn towards one another as friends, allies and collaborators, commenting 'that possibility makes claims on all of us who follow them.' (McLaren 2012, 2-5). McLaren sought a religious identity that was both strong and benevolent, one (for a Christian) both rooted in Christ and open, not as factors in tension but pointed in the same direction, because Christ is himself open and generous (McLaren 2012, 60-67). The tension regarded by some as inevitable, almost a badge of faith, should be dissipated in the warmth of our religious leaders and our God, removed rather than caused by faith.

viii) Problems with interreligious friendship

a) The need for discernment

This approach is advocated for wider interreligious relations than those between Christianity and *Sikhi*, but religion can be cruel, dangerous and destructive so

¹³⁶ 'If you are serious about wanting to win Sikhs you must be prepared to spend time building up a relationship with them'; but this is tempered if not contradicted by the advice that 'you should not approach Sikhs merely as targets for the gospel. Nor use love simply as a tool for evangelism' (Gidoomal and Wardell 1996, 152, 156).

discernment is essential (Orsi 2005, 191). Not every religious manifestation is a suitable object for friendship, and friendship requires reciprocity. Friendliness, despite its positive initial approach may also be found to be inappropriate; heart-felt friendliness is vulnerable to rejection and exploitation, an aspect of its generous and potentially sacrificial nature. Friendliness does not by its initial amiability prevent or do away with the need for discernment, true within religions and in secular settings as much as between religions. Where McLaren-style imaginative religious friendship *per se* is not appropriate, friendships across religions are still possible, but it means that the religious aspect itself remains bracketed as in many current interreligious relationships.

b) Discrimination

There is a contrasting problem that religious friendship may be posited as a divine attribute and therefore infinite, but its expression by humans is inevitably limited, as demonstrated by Jesus's relationship with the beloved disciple (*agapētós*, suggesting a "spontaneous and irrational" aspect: Kittel and Freidrich 1985, 5). That the out-workings of religious friendship are inevitably limited should not detract from but rather feed and validate the general attitude of friendliness so they retain a general benefit; and patterns of individual religious friendships have the potential to develop into a wide-ranging skein of deep-rooted connections.

c) Non-realism

It might be argued that speculation on the nature of a meeting between Nanak and Jesus is fatuous because it never happened, but scripture indicates that the communion of saints is not bound by time or confined to Christians: Jesus said 'your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was

glad' (John 8:58). I asked Devsi if Nanak is still in existence, or whether the attainment of *mukti*, release from reincarnation, involved loss of personhood. He replied that Sikh teaching has it that Nanak is alive in the sequence of the gurus including *Guru Granth Sahib Ji*, in the *sangat*, and in the souls of individual worshippers. This assured me that the friendliness I experienced in *simran* could be related to the personhood of Nanak as well as Jesus. As by the Spirit Christ dwells in the believer's heart through faith his meeting with Nanak was not just something for a theoretical cosmic realm but had a venue much closer to home (Ephesians 3:17). Stobert had once invited me to explore being an incarnation of both Christ and the Guru, inhabiting an identity that removed the tension of bigamous, transgressive duality. I responded 'if I am inhabiting Jesus and the Guru [or they me] the conflict goes, I become a point where they meet.' Now, energised by theological reflection, this invitation was bearing fruit; theology was working with my imagination in the eidic role of giving form to the phenomenon of divine friendliness, and this imaginative experience was as real as the formal theology which was giving it shape.

G) Amicism

i) Introducing amicisim

I have moved from 'friendliness' as an experience through 'friendship' as an imaginative and theological exercise and now return to the notion of friendliness – informed by some of those friendship insights - within a relational approach. My approach is not primarily about relationships between individuals, communities or institutions though it should assist those relationships. It proposes an attitude, amicisim, which sees friendliness as the appropriate initial relationship between religions themselves.

‘Amicism’ does not appear in standard dictionaries¹³⁷ but has been used in management consultancy, meaning ‘the pursuit of interests by means of personal contacts with strategically situated high-status social peers,’ and seen negatively as something that blocks social mobility (Thompson 1977, 173 note 8). However it came to be acknowledged that despite its drawbacks amicisim was hard to replace in providing the empathy necessary for an effective work-place (Thompson 2007, 20). I use a more generic and less critical definition of amicisim as ‘understanding a structure of relationships in the aspect of friendliness.’ Despite the negative connotation in a business setting my approach also involves ‘pull’ from highly placed friends, as it arises and is enabled by friendship with God and by his example; and the confusion of hierarchy as friendship straddles persons of different status is here taken to include friendship between the divine and the human, and friendship between religious personifications like Jesus and Nanak whose comparative status is unsettled. Amicism can arise in religion where the believer holds a personification (historical, mythical or philosophical) of his or her religion to be friendly. Where this is in accordance with community tradition it should have relevance that goes beyond the individual to relationships between religions.

ii) Amicism and theology of religions

The cultivation of interreligious friendship and the discernment involved in *philia* go with the selectivity of comparative theology rather than the more generalised *agapē* associated with theology of religions¹³⁸ (Fredericks 1999, 174-175). However relationalism generalises this priority of the interpersonal

¹³⁷ For example OED accessed 1 February 2018.

¹³⁸ Gaston takes faith and hope as well as love as virtues mirrored in the exclusion-inclusion-pluralism of theology of religions (Gaston 2017, 8–10).

(along with historical contingency) in approaching interreligious relations,¹³⁹ a generalisation that engages with theology of religions. This generalised approach is also recognisable in Cheetham's plea: 'can we not *just meet* without supplying a Christocentric [...] or some other interpretation?' (Cheetham 2013, 2, his italics). He advocated meeting at points of depth not claimed by theological meanings, where the inner dynamic of the person is able to embrace the deep experiences of a person of another religion, perhaps in relation to creation and beauty in a spirit of God-given play (Cheetham 2013, 90, 118, 119, 146-148). His avoidance of theological engagement, something that would cut across my own research, is qualified by his advocacy of scriptural reasoning, which has never been a purely literary discussion but always had a religious element, and there are aspects of Cheetham's approach that I seek to develop. (Cheetham 2013, 178; Ford 2006).

Theology of religions rarely wrestles directly with the relationship between faith communities, a matter for social and political skill, nor with the ultimate theological issues of the nature of divinity, where descriptions are sufficiently tentative and paradoxical to allow some accommodation. It is in the middle ground, historical understanding and the status of leaders, founders or scriptures, where the difficulties are sharpest, and it is there two suggestions from Cheetham offered emollients. First, he described having a 'multi-self' as both healthy and an aspect of the *imago dei*, which he described as a 'relating self' marked by 'an inner skilfulness or lightness of spirit that is characterized by joy,' carrying 'others' experiences, dreams and sufferings' (Cheetham 2013, 6-7). This wider openness is reminiscent of the call from the FABC for interreligious

¹³⁹ See above, p. 25.

dialogue to go alongside dialogues with other cultures and with the poor (Fox 2002, 44). The second is that he describes his book *Ways of Meeting and the Theology of Religions* as ‘an exploration in imagination’, seeking ‘to develop imaginative or even playful ways of engaging in the construction of new paradigms and comparative models,’ recalling Stobert’s approach¹⁴⁰ (Cheetham 2013, 11, 16). If this image of the divine – and therefore of Jesus and Nanak - as relational, light of spirit and joyful, is brought into imaginative focus the friendship between faith founders binds together those who follow them rather than their respective loyalties driving them apart. Where a person’s multi-self provides the setting for such a cognitively different meeting this can be regarded as gain rather than threat.

iii) Amicism – a summary

If Jesus is friendly, and he and other religious leaders can also be thought of as friends as in McLaren’s imagining, then the relation between their religions should reflect that. Amicism therefore proposes an initial approach of friendliness to all religions with the generality sought in theology of religions, a friendliness that is open, joyful, peaceable, vulnerable and discerning. Amicism also



Figure 37: The Dalai Lama and Archbishop Tutu modelling Interreligious friendship.

encourages specific friendships, albeit with the preferential and discerning elements associated with the specific relationships of comparative theology. In these friendships there is no

¹⁴⁰ Page 86 above.

regard for status, so competition between followers is otiose. Such friends are capable of criticism but prefer to praise, and are pleased by the other's success. MRP is one of many ways in which amicism can be pursued, a way of expressing divine friendliness and developing divine friendships in the interreligious context.

iv) Practical amicism

Friendliness is a personal attitude, but amicism sets a theological pattern to be advocated in community, civic and religious life, exemplified and warranted by the relationship between earth and heaven (Psalm 85:10-11). Birmingham Council of Christian Churches launched a related campaign in May 2018, *Permission to Smile*, but if good-natured approaches like this are to bring significant changes in social attitudes they need to lead to the deeper engagement proposed here, changes where our own identities – including religious identities - are allowed to become more open.



Figure 38: Illustration used in a public campaign by Birmingham Council of Christian Churches.

The employment of amicism as an imaginative theological exercise encourages that openness, allowing relations to move beyond superficial bonhomie and objectivised mutual discussion to shared, lived, exploration. This does not mean that everything discovered will be acceptable or that discernment is no longer

required, but it does mean that even significant difference need not prevent religious engagement at the deepest level, and that such engagement is not in itself a betrayal of the first religion. It calls for the investment of personal and social capital in exploring exemplary friendships to give substance to a more generalised attitude of interreligious friendliness. Taking the liberty to do this could deepen personal and institutional interreligious relationships immeasurably and release a spiritual energy with social consequences, dissipating the anxiety that currently bedevils the whole area.

13. CONCLUSION

A) 'Conclusion'

This passage does not mark the end of the experience (the MRP and its ramifications), nor does it extricate the meaning from what has gone before which is inseparable from the narrative itself, but it does mark the launching of the research into the public area. As such the author has used the third person of himself.

No harm was done by the research. The ethical issues of confidentiality, representation and researcher safety, considered carefully beforehand, were dealt with satisfactorily (provisional on the consequences of publication), as evidenced by reader response and the well-being of the author.

The research revealed limits to engagement. There were restraints on the author's involvement with *Sikhi*, some of which were practical and social, connected with time available, language difference, or gurdwara organisation. Others, preventing him becoming *Amritdhari* or *Sahajdhari*, arose out of his continuing commitment to Christianity. Under some criteria others nonetheless saw him as a Sikh, and on occasion he defined himself as a Sikh-Christian or a *Nanak panthi*. He maintained a defensible loyalty to Christianity.

New and useful insights into interreligious relations have been opened up by the detailed description of and reflection on entering into a pattern of MRP, and in particular the research has made the following contributions –

The research has contributed to study of religions by a unique presentation of the fluidity and complexity of religious belonging in its personal, bodily, communal and formal aspects. It challenges the rigidity of religious belonging that political and administrative bodies assume and religious institutions

advocate, a rigidity that feeds identity politics and discrimination, and it relates to developing discussions in the discipline (Equinox Publishing 2018).

The research has contributed to professional understanding by finding that DIFAs have experienced subjective participation in the worship of non-Christian faiths without reflection but are anxious about the reaction of the wider church. The research encourages them to be reflective but bolder in such crossing of borders, and the church to be more ready to attend to what they find.

The research has contributed to PT by offering a sustained chronological narrative showing complexities and changes, personal and social, and providing a way of binding together action, reflection (including imagination), and theological theory. It demonstrates the opportunities opened up by PT's creative approach to presenting research.

The research has contributed to theology of religions by proposing that MRP and other border-crossing is best set in the context of amicisim, an approach of religious friendliness marked by discernment, openness and vulnerability, and exemplified in specific religious friendships. Consideration of amicisim arose from the author's sensation of divine friendliness while meditating in the gurdwara, illustrating the theoretical stimulus found in the experience of boundary-crossing.

A point of further work to be undertaken arises from the finding that the academic format of the thesis distracted colleagues reading it from the professional issues raised. Further interpretation will be required to regenerate the professional engagement that was evident in earlier focus groups.

The thesis also points to the need for further research in developing an ecclesiology – and comparative studies from other religions – that regards the identity-marking aspect of religion with suspicion, bearing in mind its political,

social, institutional and market drivers; and recognising that identity has a daemonic energy, not necessarily evil, but with a different agenda from the religions to which it attaches itself. *Sikhi* offers a way into this issue through Guru Nanak's declaration 'there is no Hindu, there is no Muslim.'

In making his findings public the author is inviting readers and the wider audience who hear about this research to engage in re-imaging the world, with the boundaries between religions being regarded *prima facie* not as defended borders of fear, aggression and evasion, but as playing fields of mutual delight, affection and truthfulness.

B) Coda.

As I draw the writing to a close I have been retired for over twelve months, providing cover for services whenever needed. I have been diligent in attending weekly *seva* in Birmingham, and have kept up attendance at GKN. Living at a distance and taking services at different times, I only attend the gurdwara once a month but have settled into that pattern and no longer feel the sense of withdrawal experienced when I first retired. This August (2018) I attended a *simran* (Sikh meditation) camp for the first time at the invitation of someone I had interviewed, and was introduced to 'Tenth Gate' mysticism, the spiritual gate which can be opened alongside the nine physical portals;¹⁴¹ and in September I took my wife with a member of our local church to GKN gurdwara on a visit, something they both much appreciated. This was my wife's first visit.

Reading 'deep friendship is a calling forth of each other's chosenness and a mutual affirmation of being precious in God's eyes' made me wonder whether I had accepted the distinction between friendship and love too readily (Nouwen

¹⁴¹ See *Sri Guru Granth Sahib English Version* 1960, 974.

1992, 65). Such a thought, if it had come earlier, might have affected the direction of the thesis. So activity and reflection continue outside this narrative frame...

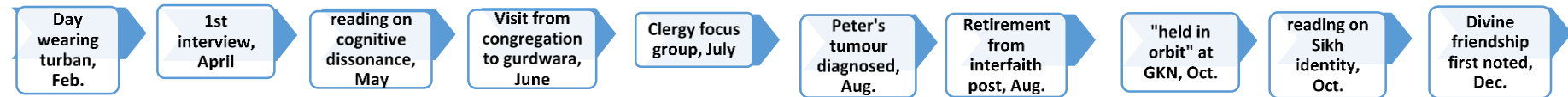
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Appendix 1. Research timeflow 2015



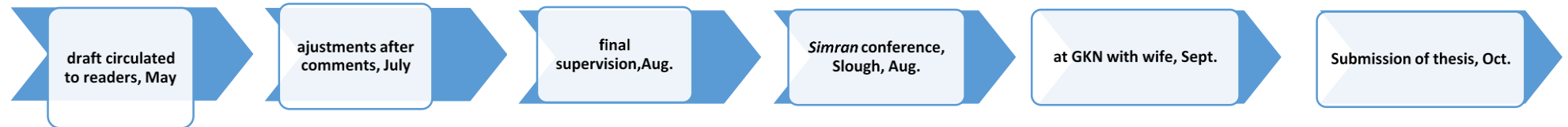
2016



2017



2018



Appendix 2. Questions at interviews

Please tell me about your religious background.

Please tell me about how that changed with your marriage/conversion/beginning of MRP.

How did you feel about that?

What did other people make of that change?

How would you describe your present religious situation?

Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix 3. Questions for collocations

a) Questions to the researcher.

Have there been any surprising insights or incidents you would like to reflect on?

Do you recognise any new areas of learning or experience that have come to you?

Are there any ways in which your understanding of Sikhism or Christianity seems to be changing? If so, why is that?

Are there any ways your world-view is changing? If so, why is that?

Are there likely to be any practical changes arising from those reviewed understandings?

Do you have any personal anxieties arising from your participating in two religions? Would you advise other people to do it?

Are there any other things you would like to discuss?

b) Questions to the collocation partner.

Are there any ways in which the researcher seems to have changed in attitude or in practice since the last meeting?

Has the researcher grown or reduced in understanding or agreement with Sikhism/Christianity?

Is there any way such changes are reflected in the researcher's life?

Are there any anxieties about the research continuing?

Appendix 4. Letter of Introduction to Guru Ka Niwas Gurdwara



**Prof Stephen Pattison, PhD, DLitt,
Department of Theology and
Religion,
ERI Building,
University of Birmingham,
Edgbaston,
BIRMINGHAM B15 2TT**

Dear Members of the Management Committee of GKN Gurdwara,

This is to introduce Canon John Barnett, a Church of England priest, Interfaith Officer for the Wolverhampton Episcopal Area of that church. John is doing some practical research for a doctoral degree course at the University of Birmingham. His aim is to help understanding between Christians and Sikhs and across the faiths more generally.

John is and will remain a practising Christian, but the research involves also attending Sikh worship regularly and engaging as much as he is able in the life of the community, including engaging in regular seva, while carefully recording how this is changing his understandings and attitudes. His main aim is to record and reflect on his own responses but that will include writing about what he sees, hears and thinks he understands about what is happening around him. He will only start on this project, which is intended to last until July 2017, with your approval.

John will report on his progress as invited, and consent can be withdrawn at any time. In July 2017 he will be leaving the area and cease regular attendance, but will offer a further report on his conclusions in time for any comment before publication after the summer of 2018. He is available to discuss this further with you at any time throughout the project, and you are also able to discuss it with his supervisor at the university, Prof. Stephen Pattison.

It is hoped that this may assist inter faith relations generally, and especially help with relations between Sikhs and Christians. If there is any way you think the research could be of specific benefit to the gurdwara itself John will be happy to discuss that.

.....

We consent to the research taking place in the terms described in the letter of -----, and with the conditions laid out there

Signed on behalf of the Gurdwara Committee,

Name *date*

Appendix 5. Letter Seeking Permission to Use Interviews



**Prof Stephen Pattison, PhD, DLitt,
Department of Theology and
Religion,
ERI Building,
University of Birmingham,
Edgbaston,
BIRMINGHAM B15 2TT**

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. Notes of the interview are attached. John may wish to refer to his notes in his thesis, so please check if there are any parts of it that you would not want referred to, and he will redact those parts. You are also of course free to withdraw your contribution entirely. John is hoping to produce a first draft of the thesis by April 2018. If you would like to see a copy of this and offer any comments at that stage you will be most welcome. Please let John know.

In the meantime please email back to John whether he has your permission to proceed, and notice of any redactions you require,

Yours sincerely,

John Barnett,
pp. Stephen Pattison

Appendix 6: Letter from the Bishop of Wolverhampton 20 June 2016

Dear John

Thank you for your recent letter tendering your resignation from the post of Interfaith Officer for the WEA with effect from September 1st.

Although I am delighted that there will be a seamless transition in terms of post holders, and that your successor is a person eminently well qualified to take on the role, I am nevertheless sorry that your time as Interfaith Officer is coming to an end. I have thoroughly enjoyed working with you and have learnt much from you in the process. You had to work, in the beginning, from pretty much a blank script and from day one you have set about the challenge of developing the post with great energy, acumen and purpose. You have endeared yourself to all through your gentleness and humility and built up huge reservoirs of trust and goodwill with all the faith communities as a result. You have also helped parish priests and their congregations, in very significant ways, to engage more fruitfully in relationship building with their neighbours of other faiths. I have always admired, and been grateful for, your weekly interfaith reports, setting a high bar in terms of accountability. You have also helped me, in innumerable ways, to engage more effectively in the inter faith area of my ministry, as well as contributing immensely to the raising of the profile of inter faith engagement within the Diocese. You have been a very trustworthy guide to us all.

The calibre and effectiveness of your ministry is reflected in the fact that there was not a shred of doubt in my mind about the need to appoint a successor in this role, despite the pressures on non-parochial posts in today's church.

I am very pleased that you will be staying on a little longer at The Beacon Church. The terms will be as you state in your letter.

With every good wish and heartfelt thanks,

Bishop Clive

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Appendix 7. 12 month report to gurdwara and church December 2016

This report is offered to the committees of church and gurdwara as people who have agreed to my research and helped me in it, so that you can see some of the things I am thinking about. This will give you a chance to check whether there is anything that might cause a problem for you if I write about it later, and it gives me a chance to pick up any thoughts you might have on what I am doing and how I am finding things.

The question that set me off on this research was: *What new and useful understanding of interreligious relations can be opened up by engaging in regular Sikh worship while continuing as a practising Christian?*

So far (5 December 2016) I have made and recorded notes on 102 weekly visits to churches and gurdwaras since October 2015; I have discussed the experience regularly with Sikh and Christian advisers, taken part in guided reflections and academic supervisions, and interviewed another ten people I have come across who are also engaged with two religions at the same time or who have changed from one religion to another. I say midweek Christian prayers with a small group and reflect on Guru Granth Sahib (the Sikh bible) daily. Some things that have struck me so far are:

1. **The welcome I have received at both the gurdwaras I have engaged with, and the supportive response of my own congregation to what I am doing.**

Gurdwara members have been very welcoming, with a number of people regularly talking things over with me or just asking how I am. My own congregation has been encouraging too, and those who visited the gurdwara were very positive about it. The only place where I have met some anxiety was

among a group of my own colleagues (clergy), an anxiety that was very kindly expressed.

2. The ease of holding two different sets of beliefs at once.

Although many people say otherwise there are differences between what Sikhs believe and what Christians believe over the nature of Jesus, over resurrection compared with reincarnation, and over the nature of salvation. Yet I have not found it as hard as you might think to agree with both. There is a lot of research in other areas that shows that we can believe two different things at once. Perhaps the same is true of religion as well.

3. Finding how I reacted in a crisis.

When we had a family crisis I responded at first by asking for Christian prayer but not asking for Sikh prayer in case I made (the Christian) God 'jealous.' I soon changed from that as the shock wore off and was glad I did as my Sikh friends joined with my Christian friends in prayer and both groups were very kind in asking me how things were going.

4. How complicated belonging to a religion is.

Am I a Sikh? Well it all depends. I am definitely not Amritdhari (baptised) But very few people at my gurdwara are. Nor am I Sarhajdhari (a slow adopter) as I am not moving towards amrit, in this lifetime at least, as that requires me to say I have no other religion than Sikhism. But I am a follower of Guru Nanak, a Nakak panthi. The more I hear and read about him the more I revere him and find his teachings attractive. People have in the past described that as enough to be a Sikh, but most modern commentators reject that. Anyway perhaps the whole notion of religious belonging is a mistake. Guru Nanak seemed to question it

when he began his public ministry by denying the separateness of Hindus and Muslims.

Am I a Christian? I am committed to following Jesus but these days sit loose to a lot of Christian doctrine, and this engagement with Sikhism would make some traditional Christians suspicious. Some traditional Catholics and Orthodox and some sects do not regard the Church of England or Methodists as the real thing. In my guided reflection I have realised that for as long as I can remember I have both wanted to belong and questioned the group I belong to at the same time; it seems to be my nature to not quite fit anywhere, and, deep down, to prefer not to.

5. How complicated belonging to a gurdwara/church is.

Do I 'belong' to the gurdwara? There is no membership roll to clear that up. I join in the worship and the fellowship there, know a lot of the people there, do service there (washing up) and make some donations. Many people find the language of the worship difficult, but I can't understand the everyday conversations in Punjabi either, despite efforts (I am going to classes in the Spring). People kindly translate the teachings and notices for me when I ask though, and they have also shared with me something of the life of the gurdwara, including embarrassing things about disagreements in the background. Despite the language issue I do feel I have a place there, though I am known to be there as an observer for a limited time, and stand out by way of race and culture. So far I feel my place to be that of an unusually involved visitor rather than a member, but I come across many others who do not regard themselves as full members either.

As to church, as the minister I have a special place, but is it one of belonging? I am here for a limited time, parachuted in, and am greeted each

week by the worship leader as though I am a visitor. On circuit (once a month) I come across fellowships and situations where I feel less at home than I now do in the gurdwara.

6. There may be ways of following both Jesus and Guru Nanak with integrity.

I have been worrying about this. In the Indian culture I believe the relationship with one's guru is an exclusive one, and for Christians that is true of Jesus. So is it possible to follow two spiritual teachers? Perhaps the way through this is to think about the relationship as one of friendship. Jesus calls his disciples his friends, and friendship is very important in Guru Nanak's life and ministry. Good friendship is not exclusive, but gives the courage and confidence to form other friendships as well. Can I say I am walking with both Jesus and Guru Nanak, as two precious friends?

7. This has enriched my interreligious experience.

Meditating in the gurdwara has helped me meditate at home. In the past I have visited gurdwaras many times as an interfaith officer, often as the bishop's representative but now things are different. Coming as a student rather than an official representative I am humbled both by being corrected and by regularly sharing in menial tasks. That humbled meditation brings me closer to Jesus as well as to Guru Nanak.

Appendix 8. Article for *Mann Jitt Weekly* 22-28 June 2017

Believing Sikhism while remaining Christian.

Sikhs are famous for their hospitality, and my story makes it clear their reputation is well-deserved. For seven years I was responsible for building relationships between the Church of England and other faiths in Wolverhampton, Walsall and West Bromwich. As the time came to retire I felt more and more that I was called to build deeper relationships with one other faith community rather than spreading myself around everyone, and I longed to become (as much as possible) a Sikh while remaining a Christian. With my friend Mr Bhajan Singh Devsi I approached the committee of Guru Ka Nivas Gurdwara on the Birmingham New Road and they not only made me welcome but also gave me permission to use my experience in some research I was doing for a doctorate at Birmingham University. The question I was trying to answer was: *What new and useful understanding of interreligious relations can be opened up by engaging in regular Sikh worship while continuing as a practicing Christian?* I began weekly attendance in October 2015, alongside my church attendance. I say midweek Christian prayers with a small group and reflect on Guru Granth Sahib daily. Simran in the Gurdwara has helped me meditate at home. I also help now with the Midland Langar Seva Society's feeding station in Birmingham once a week.

Gurdwara members have been very welcoming. My own congregation has been encouraging too, and a group who visited the Gurdwara themselves were very positive about it. Do I 'belong' to the Gurdwara? As I am not Ramgarhia I cannot become a member there, but I join in the worship and the fellowship, know a lot of the people, do seva there (washing up) and make some donations. As to

language many people find the language of the worship difficult, but I can't even understand the everyday conversations in Punjabi, despite efforts, though people kindly translate the teachings and notices for me when I ask. Although I stand out by way of race and culture, and despite the language issue, I do feel I have a place there as a familiar attendee.

There are some differences between what Sikhs believe and what Christians believe over the nature of Jesus, over resurrection compared with reincarnation, and over the nature of salvation. Yet I have not found it as hard as you might think to agree with both. Perhaps religion can hold things together where the ego finds a contradiction.

Belonging to a religion is complicated! Am I a Sikh? Although 'Sikh' can just mean 'learning by being a student' and I am definitely that, in these days of more identity conscious Sikhism it would understandably cause offence to refer to myself as a Sikh while intending to stay Christian as well. I am not amrit-dhari, but very few people at my Gurdwara are. Nor am I sehaj-dhari as I am not moving towards Amrit, in this lifetime at least. Amrit would need me to say I have no other religion than Sikhism, and I would not want to deny my Christianity. Perhaps I have become that rather old-fashioned thing, a Nanak-panthi. Nanak-panthi was a description that followers of the Guru took in past years, but is fell into disuse because it was not clear that they had made the decision to break from Hinduism. It still seems a good term for me to use, showing loyalty, but modest in its claims. The more I hear and read about Guru Nanak Dev Ji the more I revere him and find his teachings attractive. Let me explain why. First, Guru Nanak's emphasis on non-discrimination in terms of religion, caste and gender, while consistent with Christianity, seems to me more clearly stated. Second, as I come to retirement,

the model of Guru Nanak finishing his missionary journeys and settling down to the life of a householder appeals. Third, I find Guru Nanak easier to identify with than the later more communal and military tradition of Sikhism. That is not to criticise that tradition, it is just to say it is tied up with a cultural background I have only just begun to explore. Fourth, his criticism of the Hinduism of the day, like Jesus's criticism of some religious practices of his time, strikes me as liberating. I also remain committed to Jesus because knowing he gave his life for his friends is inspiring, his call for forgiveness is a way of changing the world, and his mysterious resurrection is a powerful sign that love is stronger than death. That and a lifetime's commitment to following him means there is no intention to break my loyalty to Him in seeking to follow Guru Nanak as well, something that is appreciated by Sikh friends who would never encourage me to convert, but to follow the karma given me, this karma of two-foldness.

I once worried about whether it is possible to follow both Jesus and Guru Nanak with integrity. The relationship with a Guru is an exclusive one, and for Christians that is also true of Jesus. So is it possible to follow two spiritual teachers? Perhaps the way through this is to think about the relationship as one of friendship. Jesus calls his disciples his friends, and is accused of being too friendly with irreligious people, and friendship is very important in Guru Nanak's life and ministry, notably his friendships with the Muslim Mardana and the Hindu Bhai Bala. Good friendship is not exclusive but gives the courage and confidence to form other friendships as well. Can I say I am walking with both Jesus and Guru Nanak, as two precious friends? In the end what I call myself is unimportant: 'there is no Hindu, and no Muslim,' but to become *Gurmukh*, or holy, is the one thing necessary.

In the past I have visited Gurdwaras many times as an interfaith officer, but now things are different. I no longer come as an official representative of the church but as a student. I am humbled both by being corrected and by regularly sharing in menial tasks. That humbled meditation brings me closer to my Lord Jesus as well as to Guru Nanak Dev Ji. As my time attending Guru Ka Nivas comes to an end (we are moving away) I give thanks for a life-changing experience.

Appendix 9. Exercise in imaginative theology, September 2017

The two ways

I wanted some way of attending to the friendship between Jesus and Nanak alongside theological speculation and the practical outworking of friendship across faiths. I decide to try to sketch Nanak and Jesus walking together, and then to imagine them present in each other's stories, with me there as well. That way the aesthetic would be invited to join the rational and the ethical; and so truth, beauty and virtue would all be engaged in this quest for unity.

Notes about the sketching are in italics, and the imaginative exercise is in plain script. The setting was a holiday in Mallorca. This was something playful, suitable for holiday, but it felt impossibly decadent. We were based in a villa, four of us, two married couples with 1/3 acre garden of olives, grapes, limes, pomegranates, persimmon and fruits of Sharon. We had an outside seating area where I wrote and drew.

It was important to me to establish equality between the figures, so neither of them talking or gesticulating to the other but both just walking along together. Why walking rather than sitting? I liked the dynamic nature of this. Many of the googled pictures of friends walking were from behind



Figure 1: Model for two men walking together

but I wanted to show their faces. Eventually I found one, and there was a balance,



Figure 2: How Guru Nanak might have Dressed

Figure 3: Guru Nanak as a Younger Man

one was leading, the other in the foreground. I placed their heads at the same height and at the same distance from the centre of the field. I wanted to portray them at about the same age, inevitably younger than many pictures of

Nanak. I wanted to get as near an historical picture of both figures as I could, drawing on the internet again for some suggestions as to their physical appearances and the clothing they may have worn.

I was aware of the risk of offence to both communities. Although pictures of Nanak are a commonplace in Sikh literature and in gurdwaras I knew of the uproar over the film Nanak Shah Fakir (2015), and that there is growing sensitivity about depictions of the Guru (BBC 2015). I was also



Figure 4: How Jesus might have looked

Figure 5 How Jesus might have dressed

aware of the botched restoration of the picture of Jesus in Borja and the derision

to which that gave rise (BBC 2013). I was then entering on risky holy ground in a very amateurish way, but there were two prizes to be had. One was a time of concentration in a different way on Nanak and Jesus and the relation between them with its possibility of new understanding; the other was the possibility that this was the first picture of Jesus and Nanak together. There are plenty where they are in a row of portraits with other faith leaders, but this for all its laughable amateurism, would be something different, with a depiction of relationship.

Sarna acknowledges that his own work is based on the Janamsakhi materials, and proceeds on the basis that some of what is described is factual, while some must be under the category of folklore, and educated guesses have to be made. Along those lines, he comes up with a surprising description of Guru Nanak's attire:

Nanak was accompanied by Mardana on his travels, who carried his rabab. He dressed in strange clothes that could not be identified with any sect and symbolized the universality of his message. He wore the long, loose shirt of a Muslim dervish but in the brownish red colour of the Hindu sanyasi. Around his waist he wore a white kafni or cloth belt like a faqir. A flat, short turban partly covered a Qalandar's [Sufi mystic order] cap on his head in the manner of Sufi wanderers. On his feet, he wore wooden sandals, each of a different design and colour. Sometimes, it is said, he wore a necklace of bones around his neck. (Sarna 2012, 53 f.)

As to the imaginary work this is based very loosely on an Ignatian exercise of imagining oneself in the presence of Jesus, and what he might say to you (O'Brien 2011, 14-15). In seeking to insert Nanak and Jesus in each other's stories and see how that worked out I had to decide how to choose my stories over the fourteen mornings of the holiday. Again I tried to have a more historical basis for the scenes, and so chose them from *The Gospel of Jesus according to the Jesus Seminar* which claimed to offer a consensus of views as to the historical likelihood of stories about him, and from *The Book of Nanak* which

seeks to place some of the traditional stories in 'as precise a historical framework as possible' (Funk and the Jesus Seminar 1999; Sarna 2012, 9). I worked through them chronologically, but then jumped ahead to the passion and resurrection (both needing to go beyond the Jesus Seminar text) and the retirement of Nanak. There were times where loneliness was a part of the story. This I felt applied particularly to the crucifixion and burial of Jesus and so Nanak leaves him in Gethsemane, entering into his own experience of loneliness at this time as the relationship is sustained through the parting.

14 September

First sketch of Jesus and Nanak together. Got into the technicalities. Tasks it has thrown up: turn Jesus' head further towards Nanak. Pleats in the skirt for Nanak and more hair. Limbs need tidying, but generally I am pleased with the first day. Will I get to subtleties like shading? The big issue is expression. Could be worse. I am not sure this will take me the whole fortnight, not that it will be good in anyone's eyes but probably the best I can hope for. It will go off if I pither too much.

Nanak at the temptations of Jesus.

The temptation 'to prove you are God's son' over both the bread and the pinnacle. Nanak is standing next to me watching, but hidden from Jesus: 'He needs to be on his own, for this is his victory. He is revealing his *Gurmukhi*, turning away from these temptations of the ego, spiritual and worldly. The irony is these events will be seized on by his followers to promote him in just those egotistical terms, and so promote themselves of course.'

Then they were finished, and slipping in with the angels he sped to bring Jesus nourishment. Jesus greeted him 'we'll both of us have divinity force-fed to us if they have their way.'

Nanak put an arm round him: 'you saw them off!'

'For the time being. They'll be back, for us both.'

15 September

Managed to turn Jesus' head more to profile so looking towards Nanak now. Did some detail on mouths, thickened Nanak's beard and drew his sandals, drew in the pleats on his skirt. I didn't draw odd sandals which would just have been confusing. Then felt sure Nanak's head was too large giving him a cartoonish look so had to reduce it. Turned to the hands after thickening the legs a bit and got them OK. But then, what about joining hands? No real model for that on internet (lots from behind) so started sketching. Would this be too intimate politically? Aesthetically? Got a first impression and called it a day. Will make any alterations that scream out to me and may have a go at shading but may be getting to the moment to leave alone. Problem with holding hands – there is a natural dominant. Nanak happens to be in front (to use best facial image) so he seems to be leading. Strange how intimacy and dominance come together.

Nanak's thread-tying

Jesus and I are at Nanak's *yajnoparavitam* (Hindu thread-tying ceremony). We are eleven or twelve years old. We are among his friends, behind the relatives, all bustling about, but being careful to step round the sacred signs drawn on the floor. I am still stood at the back but Jesus has moved through the crowd to the front row. Something is going wrong. The crowd has gone quiet, someone gasps, and then everyone seems to be talking at once with some voices raised

in anger, though I can see Jesus now and he is not saying anything. Nanak, it seems, has refused to wear the thread.

Later on we are left together as the adults, despite events, are busy about the celebrations. 'How did they take it?' asks Jesus, because Nanak's parents had taken him away for a quiet word.

'Oh, you know,' says Nanak. 'It's hard for parents when they see us opening up to the divine.'

I say 'I keep quiet about it, but you two just lay it out. Do you remember (to Jesus) when you told your mum and dad that the Temple was your real home? That didn't go down too well.'

'Yes' says Jesus. According to our parents I'm too religious and you (looking at Nanak) aren't religious enough!

16 September

More detail in joined hands. Replaced (Muslim) hat with flattish turban. Even if it is not historical it makes Nanak more recognisable. Need to decide how to edge, fill, shape the whole. Might do more here, or might address that at home. Turned Nanak's feet more towards Jesus. Beginning to feel more confident with it.

The children come to Jesus.

The disciples are stopping some family groups. The families are talkative and a bit rowdy; some are desperate. The word has got round that a blessing for your child from Jesus has magic powers. They are getting in the way of people who have serious needs for healing and deliverance and now they are disrupting Jesus' rest periods too. The disciples are letting a few serious adult enquirers through and I am about to go with them but Nanak stops me: 'Let's wait here with the children.' I protest there is no sign they are going to let the children through,

but Jesus then calls out firmly to the disciples not to stand in their way. The children rush towards him like an unblocked stream, but become calm as they settle round him. He talks with them and blesses them, then as the hub-hub dies down he spots Nanak and myself among the families and gives him a smile: 'Are you still a child in all your wisdom, my friend?'

'I still meditate as I did when I was grazing the family buffaloes.'

They both laugh, remembering Nanak's boyhood career as an absent-minded herdsman. 'I can see you there as you speak, and the buffaloes wandering off into the neighbour's field.'

'Then you will see that no harm was done.'*

'None at all, none at all,' agrees Jesus, and again they both laugh, before Jesus turns back to the remaining children, giving them once more his full attention.

[*The buffaloes had trampled the neighbour's crops, but when the furious neighbour took Nanak's father to see the damage all was restored as though nothing had happened.]

17 September

Put some shading in. Not 100% successful but the best I can do without more guidance. It may be the best I can do for the moment, but I will look each morning. Jesus and Nanak are leaning out from one another. This is just a feature of the photo of friends walking that I copied. I thought now I have noticed it changing it so that they lean towards each other, but the leaning out gives a dynamic of mutual attention and regard, as though they are getting each other in focus. Makes the joining of hands more important as a linking counterpoint.

Nanak's period of listlessness

His family is worried. I have called by at the house with Jesus. Nanak is in the back room, withdrawn and eating and drinking very little. We join the family as they discuss the doctor's diagnosis (they were 'not to worry. Nanak is not an ordinary person but a great being'). But worry they do, about 'sickness of the soul,' which is the only way they can understand this. Will it just go of its own accord or should the doctor be giving him some special treatment? Is he being a bit too casual about it? I support the doctor, trying to cheer them up by speculating about what sort of 'great' Nanak will be.

I notice Jesus has slipped away and is sitting still and quiet with Nanak in the back room. He is not saying or doing anything, but they are clearly in some sort of companionship. After a time Jesus comes out and gets a cup of water. He goes back in, sits back down and drinks some of it before putting it down between himself and Nanak. He does nothing to specifically offer the cup to Nanak who does not move for a while. But eventually, calmly and determinedly, as though the time is right, he does pick it up, and sips at it. He puts it down again and briefly smiles at Jesus.

There is a brief stir of interest from the people in the front room who have watched this happening, but by then Nanak and Jesus have relapsed into quiet.

18 September

Jesus preaching.

I am in the crowd as Jesus is teaching. Nanak is at the front and beckons me to come through and stand with him. As the teaching goes on we find a place to sit. Then Jesus tells us a story about a big feast, of those who do not attend, and of the final order to make people come whether they want to or not. Nanak is

engaged but looks a little saddened. 'Jesus is sharing his weariness, his discouragement, his frustration. I feel for him and wish I could help him but my time has not yet come, and...'

'And what?' I prompt.

'...and I think he is going to regret those last few words.' How do I react to this? Defensive on behalf of Jesus, a shocked recognition that I share this perspective, and a feeling of close identification with Jesus after my own burst of irritability (an event earlier in the day on holiday). This all produces a momentary resentment of Nanak, but then that melts away as I realise he has spoken out of concern not judgement, and I appreciate his sharing such an intimate thought with me.

19 September

[Author's wife] thought Nanak's face good. She queried their holding hands as being gay. Do I need to be careful of that? OK to hold hands in the Middle East? But what about India? Aside from any offence caused is this a distraction?

Nanak feeds the sadhus.

[It seems too much 'in the frame' for Jesus and me to follow him throughout, but where to meet? Perhaps in the market place where he is spending the twenty pieces of silver with which his father has trusted to him to make a profit and prove himself as a merchant. Instead he is spending it all on food for some starving holy men he has met on the way.]

I am with Jesus in the market buying a few basic needs when we become aware of excitement at some of the food stalls. It is clear that someone is spending a lot more than usual. We go over to see what is going on and there is Nanak, spending away, with his father's servant, Bala, trying to stop him. Wheat,

sugar, ghee, all in quantity. The word has gone round that he has plenty of money and is clearly intent on spending the lot. Bala gives up, standing disconsolate and anxious as the traders press round Nanak, eager for his custom. If they are expecting a soft touch they are disappointed; he is astute in his dealings, but there are still some big sales to be made. Bala says to Jesus 'his father will be furious.'

'His earthly father, perhaps,' replies Jesus. Nanak hears him and they laugh together as Bala's exasperation increases.

20 September

Calling the disciples

Nanak hears Jesus preaching about the kingdom as a mustard seed, leaven, and an empty jar, and against anxiety. Nanak smiles broadly: 'You have found the way.'

Jesus, returning the smile, replies 'The way has found me!'

Jesus calls Simon Peter and Andrew, James and John, and Levi. Nanak and I watch, then Jesus turns to me and invites me to follow him as well. I am reluctant to leave Nanak but, knowing Jesus to be the one I must follow, I go to him.

Nanak comes with me! Later I ask 'Aren't you disappointed that Jesus didn't ask you to follow him?' He replied 'Each of us has our path. I know the time will come when I will be with my own and following the way set before me.'

'But if this is not your calling why are you following Jesus now?'

'I am your companion and a friend of Jesus.'

'How did you become his friend if you are not his follower?'

'We have been friends since before the world began, and not just us.'

‘Who else then?’

‘Our friendship now is in you, and your friendship is in us.’ And now Nanak asks me a question: ‘When did that begin, do you think?’

‘A couple of years ago.’

He laughs kindly: ‘so it may seem, dear John, so it may seem.’

21 September

Nanak’s return.

Nanak disappeared after going into the Bain river. Three days later he reappears and says ‘There is no Hindu, and there is no Musselman.’ As people discuss his words he says to Jesus ‘Can we speak alone?’ I watch them go and wonder what they are talking about. When they return Nanak is still very quiet, though his words have created a furore. I ask Jesus what they have spoken about. At first I think I have caused offence by my curiosity, but then he says ‘dear John, I will tell you what you can bear to hear. You know about my time of temptation in the wilderness, but there is to be another time when I shall be withdrawn from sight, returning on the third day, and we have been comparing his experience and mine.’

‘Which was the best?’

He doesn’t answer my question, looking for a moment disappointed. Then, half to himself, he replies: ‘his is a beginning, mine is an end; his is a receiving, mine is a giving; his is grace, mine is sacrifice; yet there is no contrast, each complements the other.’

How could I have asked such a crass question? And yet there was something about how Jesus has answered that made me glad that I had.

22 September

Exorcism

I am following with Nanak as Jesus preaches in Galilee. In one of the synagogues Jesus is challenged. He yells 'Shut up and get out of him!' A demon comes out, but instability remains in the air. There are challenges to Jesus, his challenge to the demons' authority, instability in Satan's own domain, the challenge to the religious authorities this act of power represents, the arrival of a new rule and a new kingdom (like being in the middle of a coup), and instability of identity: who will the possessed person be now? And who is Jesus?

I know Nanak is not over-impressed by works of power or with the whole deliverance business. I ask 'What do you make of this?'

'In this casting out Jesus has broadcast instability far beyond the individual and beyond the synagogue within which it was permitted to reside. There will be consequences.'

'Then why did he do it?'

'For truth. True he is and will be hereafter. But revealing is also unleashing.'

I see sadness on Nanak's face. 'His karma is becoming clear.'

23 September

Lalo the carpenter

Jesus and I are among a crowd that has gathered at the house of Lalo the carpenter. We were travelling with Nanak, but, like Mardana, have been staying elsewhere rather than overburden the humble craftsman. Nanak calls Jesus forward to meet Lalo, and I go too. The conversation soon shifts so that Jesus and Lalo are busy discussing the technicalities of carpentry, comparing notes on

how things are done in their different cultures, as handed down by their respective fathers. Nanak is delighted by this technical conversation between friends and happy to sit quietly, despite their occasionally offering us ways into the conversation. The friendship between Jesus and Nanak is an open one which is not threatened by other friendships but enjoys them.

I am aware that outside there is some jealousy though, from the village landlord, who feels shown up because Nanak has chosen to stay with Lalo rather than him; and this ties in with a distain among some of the onlookers who not only despise Lalo, but now place Jesus in the lower caste of the carpenters, no Brahmin then, or, even, like Nanak, a trader. But that animosity is all outside the door. For us in the house there is a warm, friendly gathering with barriers being broken down, and the technical talk between Lalo and Jesus gives it a mood of settled domesticity. Holiness is rooted, friendly, practical, without effect. Being there reminds me of my Ramgarhia (carpenter) friends, and I feel them with me in their solidarity with Lalo.

24 September

The arrest of Jesus

Comment from Devsi: Arrest of Jesus (where Nanak cuts guard's ear). This is wrong. The first five gurus never carried any weapon.

[This was my error, but perhaps its spiritual rather than historical authenticity can be salvaged by remembering that "Nanak" is present in the later gurus too.]

Nanak and I are gathered with the disciples, have been with them overnight, and then the soldiers come. There is uproar as Jesus' followers protest. Then there is Nanak, strong and bold, his knife drawn, standing at Jesus' side. A soldier approaches him, spear at the ready, but he moves to one side and, to

show he means business, cuts the soldier's ear. For a moment the attention shifts from Jesu to Nanak, but then Jesus tells him to put the knife away. In a hushed moment as the soldiers wait to see if Nanak will comply, Jesus touches the wounded ear and the blood ceases to flow. We are confused. If we are not to defend him then what are we to do? The soldiers take advantage of our confusion and seize Jesus, and now they start to try to grab the rest of us too. We run.

As Nanak and I draw up panting in the back streets to which we have fled I realise I am shaking with fear and shock. They might have arrested me too; and then there was the shock of Nanak drawing his knife. I knew he carried it but had never seen him use it in earnest; he was always so skilful at diffusing anger on his own journeys. To see him handling himself in a fight so skilfully confused me. And then I realised I was also shocked by Jesus' rebuke to him. I have never heard either of them speak to the other abruptly before. We are far enough away to be safe for the moment, so we lean against the wall as we get our breath.

'You could have been killed' I say.

'I would have died for him without a moment's hesitation.'

'As a friend?'

'I would fight to protect anyone being silenced, oppressed, treated unjustly; but yes, he is my friend.'

'I was shocked when he told you to stop.' There, I have said it. How will he react? He looks intently at me, and then as he sees me blush he gently looks away.

'I have known this time would come since we first met. He has his karma, I have mine...you have yours. They may diverge for a time but you will see, you *will* see, that there is a deeper tide that brings all these different currents together.'

Jesus has a lonely path to follow now, the loneliest, and all of us become lonely too, companions and friends.'

As the power had drained out of Jesus and now the joy departed from Nanak how is it that I was seeing their glory all the more? And, at this point of brutal separation, how is it that their unity is coming into sharp focus, plain, before my eyes?

25 September

Nanak and the Pirs

Local holy men, Sufi pirs, come to Nanak as he approaches their village. They bring a cup of milk, full to the brim, implying there are enough holy men there already and Nanak is not wanted. I am about to say that Nanak is special and they should listen to him, but he gestures for me to be quiet. He calmly goes over to a jasmine bush, plucks a single leaf off a flower and gently balances it on the surface of the milk, not spilling a drop. I am moved to laughter by his clever response, not leading to antagonism but to peace and good feeling, and the tension dissipates. When he goes with them into the town he shows such humility and grace that there is no sense of his trying to take control. I can see Jesus is impressed too. Is he perhaps thinking of the neatness and lightness of touch of this compared with his own experience of sharper conflict and the dark uncertainties those have brought? He is smiling, but sadly. In the discourses with the pirs Nanak refers to Jesus as a fellow sant. Looking at Jesus he says 'where a river of living water flows one leaf floats on the surface, another sinks beneath, but both are washed to the sea.' I am made aware again of the lightness of touch that Jesus and Nanak show in their friendship, neither seeking to displace the other.

26 September

Picked up a couple of [author's wife's] comments. She thought the joined hands looked a bit gay. That would seem to start a red herring and so I decided to unlink them. I thought about linked arms, but it is difficult to do that equally, and their shoulders are too far apart so I would have to have a major re-draw of one or both figures, so I leave them unlinked, each standing in their own, related, ground. Also she preferred Nanak's face to that of Jesus. Why was that? I have taken a 'typical Palestinian of that era' as my model, but perhaps it would do no harm to have a rather fuller beard. I am aware that I have gradually moved in a more traditional direction as I have continued with the sketch but am relaxed about that. It is not my intention to cause offence, and if some traditional features help with identification so much the better, not that this is for show, but I find it helps me.

Resurrection

It is early morning and Nanak and I are walking along the seashore when we come across Jesus' followers on the beach. They have clearly been fishing and there is a very good catch in the net. There is a smell of barbequed fish, and there next to them as they cook, right in the middle of his followers, is Jesus. We settle with them, eating the fish and some bread. As time goes on Jesus has some special words for Simon Peter, and then he turns to Nanak: 'My dear friend, our closeness is not defined by time or space, and those differences will not separate us, for nothing can. What the world sees as separation cannot last, and you John (Jesus turns to me) will have a part in overcoming it.'

The meal eventually finishes, and we help gut and clean the fish before leaving, following the expert actions of the fishermen. We are loath to go,



because we know this is the last time we will see Jesus in the flesh. We also know, as the apostles go one way and Nanak another, that the worldly separation Jesus spoke about is about to begin. Now I have to choose, and, as is my karma, I follow the apostles. I am constantly looking over my shoulder, and feel all the pain of parting. Then I remember Jesus' promise that the separation will

end, and take courage.

*Figure 6: Nanak and Jesus walking together.
Author's sketch*

27 September

The last go at getting Jesus' right

arm to look better. I think this is some sort of problem from the original picture. Nothing much to help on the web. I am reduced to looking in the mirror and trying to model Jesus' arm on my own. And I think it is a bit better.

Nanak in Kartarpur

Nanak has returned to Kartarpur and 'retired,' he has taken off his travelling clothes and has put on those of a householder. I watch as the Hindu holy men question and taunt him, and one of them sneers at this new worldliness. Nanak makes them more angry by saying that their vaunted asceticism is turned sour by their begging. He then sits out the ensuing storm of hostility until gradually its energy is dissipated and they withdraw. Nanak's family and supporters realise

that a crucial moment has passed, and now, through langar, through regular prayer, through generosity and hard work, through the humdrum life of the household, a new path is being established.

Although I watching all this I am confused; I don't know what I am doing there. Since the parting of Nanak and Jesus I thought my way was to be with Jesus. I did not expect to be here, being accepted as a member of Nanak's household, and am not sure I should be. Still feeling uneasy I go through to *langar*. Despite my misgivings it is easy to follow the crowd, and, truth be told, I am hungry. Chapattis, lentils, spicy vegetables, rice pudding, are served swiftly and efficiently to the growing numbers. I give a brief nod of thanks to each of the servers. Then the man serving the rice reaches across, touches my arm, and gives the briefest of smiles. I move along, no longer uneasy, and find a space to eat my twice-blessed food.

Appendix 10. Responses from readers, May and June 2018.

This feedback is recorded in full apart from proof-reading comments along with my responses, as an exercise in transparency. Feedback came from:

members of the Christian and Sikh congregations where I conducted my research (2);

collocutors and guide in reflection (3);

colleagues in interfaith roles (4);

academics (2);

family member (1).

Some correspondents only read part of the text.

Congregational responses

Comments of members of Sikh and Christian congregations dealing with the specific issue of how the draft was received there are recorded first. They were invited to show the draft to other members of the congregations but so far as I know did not do so.

Sikh Response:

Their [GKN's committee] question was 'what are we going to get out of it?' The usual answer would be money, but you have answered that now, they have got the name of GKN everywhere, what more publicity can you have?

This is not run of the mill but unique. I will contact the *Express and Star* at the right time and *Mann Jitt* (Punjabi newspaper) and the Asian channels. This is the sort of thing people should learn about, and GKN will be proud of you.

Christian Response:

I believe it is very fair to Beacon Church. It's very well written and flows so well. I really wish I had time to read through the whole document because the parts I have read are so very interesting.

I have gathered other comments under themes and left them anonymous.

I have indicated my responses in red.

General comments.

It is a clear and well written piece.

I enjoyed reading your thesis. Well done on such an interesting piece of work.

I thought the material made a fascinating read, and that it was very brave of you to reveal so much of yourself semi-publicly like that. The thesis brings in a lot of material on the Sikh faith, and I would hope that it might have a wider circulation than simply the University of Birmingham once you've graduated.

The genre is somewhat unusual. I found the approach very appealing, and obviously you have taken advice to be sure that an auto-ethnographical approach is acceptable. All in all, I thought this was a fascinating piece of writing, and really enjoyed reading it.

I've read your theses and found it to be compelling and fascinating. I think it gives a unique and thoughtful exploration of engaging with Sikhism at a deeply spiritual level. I think it's excellent and fully deserves to be a PhD.

Nanak gave a stone to his companion Mardana when he asked for food. He took it to several shopkeepers who laughed at him and at last came to a jeweller who offered him 101 rupees just for letting him see it. Only a person inside the university will recognise the value of this thesis. It will encourage young people in this subject and to engage with other religions.

I have found it completely fascinating and can't wait to read the finished version. Do please take my musings as you see fit – it is just my thoughts on a brilliant piece of work.

Had a good read. Very impressive stuff.

I had an interesting discovery myself over the course of my reading: I found that hours after having read I would find myself reflecting upon something in my life according to what you had been saying. So, for instance, when you were speaking of the cognitive dissonance being manageable, I realised that this was a description of something I had felt concerning things which affected me. I have found reading your draft not only a great privilege

and pleasure but also realise that, having read it, I have been affected by it. I feel that I have swallowed it and will be digesting it for a long time to come. Some parts I will no doubt 'lose' and others will be absorbed into my own understanding, just like physical food.

I am surprised at the level of involvement which I gained from the way in which you wrote the draft and went about the research. The descriptions take one a long way but the reflections and reports on encounters and engagement, the questions you ask, these take one far deeper into the whole experience. It appeared to me that *experiencing* both religions facilitated/informed/enriched your understanding of both not only intellectually but emotionally. Your experience enabled you to highlight the culturality of religious faith more powerfully than simply studying faith in different contexts would have done because you were part of it.

I guess I was more interested rather than surprised by the extent you have embraced Sikhism and managed to go much further than just observing but engaged so much and have experienced the religion despite cultural and language barriers and Christian allegiance and then how far you have been able to become a MRP. I think you show deep religious understanding and commitment throughout. The bits that interested most were your personal reflections. I think you have been incredibly honest and have allowed yourself to be vulnerable in a way if that makes sense. The piece also demonstrates your commitment to this study. I don't know how you've fit it all in time wise. You have obviously been incredibly focused and organised throughout.

I think the mood of the piece is positive. It is honest about the complexities of MRP and also challenging in parts but also shows that underneath the politics and hierarchies and cultural expectations on a personal level it is possible.

It's fascinating. It's your journey but how might that translate into a guide for MRP as a spiritual journey, allowing yourself to participate in another community for the sole purpose of growth, but recognising that spiritual growth means you add to something as you do it? You are talking about the honesty of participation if communities are open to that but you had to prepare a lot of ground to do that whereas somebody else might pick this up and wonder how that could work. How would another faith community allow that to happen? So there is a spiritual journey with a lot of interreligious participation.

Comments on structure and presentation.

I expected to see more of a literature review **defended (p. 9)** (and perhaps slightly more on method). In terms of the shape of the whole text, I expected slightly clearer scaffolding and signposting of your main argument and the key argument of your thesis. It is clear at the end, but not entirely clear why this is the result of your work or how it shapes how you have written it all up. Some of this may be my not quite understanding the genre of auto ethnography, which is new to me. If that is the case, then apologies, do ignore me.

I extended the explanation of the narrative approach taken, and the variance that had produced from a standard PhD (pp. 8-13). I also added an overview of the whole thesis early on (pp. 6-8), and extended the literature review (pp. 28-31).

I wondered if it might be useful to preface the material with some discussion of your approach. **I extended this (pp. 8-13).** The other examples of auto-ethnography (Brown, Lofland, Festinger) might profitably be brought into the main text, as part of a methodological discussion, rather than simply be consigned to a footnote. **Done (p. 40).** I thought this might help inspire confidence that your method of approach is academically respectable and has precedents. On methodological issues, I think I would have welcomed a statement of aims up front at the beginning of the thesis. You get on to it later, but I think it might be helpful to orientate the reader. What does this research hope to achieve? **Introduced (pp. 6-7).** Why single out the Sikhs? (You get to this but earlier mention might be helpful. Also, why that particular gurdwara?) **Left in place as an aspect of 'method', but inserted earlier pointer (p. 7).** There is also the issue of literature reviewing. It is normal for the thesis to have a substantial section that discusses the extent literature on the topic. **Defended (p. 9).** Maybe you think this is precluded by your auto-ethnographical approach. As the discussion progresses, you thoroughly inspire confidence that you are familiar with the literature, but when other pieces of writing are introduced I thought the material was very compressed, and that it would be helpful to develop arguments on behalf of these authors and give the reader more of an impression of their positions. **Brevity of thesis format clarified (p.6) and reference made to earlier literature review (p.9).** It's always difficult to know, when mentioning one's own background, precisely how much one reveals about oneself to the reader. No doubt this is something you have thought about. Is it relevant, for example, to mention visits to the gym – or is it your view that this adds colour and enhances the human touch to the thesis? **I retained the vision as a key aspect of my motivation.**

My only question, from an academic perspective, is whether the descriptions of your visits to Church and Gurdwara are too descriptive and might be enhanced by being shorter and with more space for reflection.

I reduced my description of 'normal days' from 5626 words to 4642, and tightened other passages of field notes, increasing reflection space.

I really enjoyed reading it. There's stuff I want to go back to, partly about method. I got a lot from what you have written about PT and about MRP as well. I won't say it's an easy read, but felt that it was on its rails rather than bumping along the sleepers!

Theological Issues

What powers are at work in the whole issue, operating partly through doctrine? The issue of the daemonic power of identity in religion is now raised (p. 165, pp. 200-201).

How does this writing relate to Jesus as Lord? Addressed (pp. 187).

How is it admissible to equate the Spirits of Jesus and Nanak? For the Holy Spirit in other religions see Phan's view (p. 29); and p. 95 for a comment of my own. On discernment see p. 176.

Pages 81-82: Reincarnation. My own feeling is that you are bending over too far backwards towards the Sikh faith. Reincarnation (or more precisely, the pre-existence of the soul) was declared a heresy at the Fifth Ecumenical Council in 553 CE. Claims that there are references to reincarnation in the Bible (e.g. Elijah) are spurious. John Hick did not really support reincarnation, but rather suggests that a purgatorial after-death state may be an appropriate compromise between his more traditional Protestant view and the eastern belief systems that he discusses. While I think you do an excellent job in respecting the beliefs and practices of the Sikhs (and of course the mistakes to which you refer are understandable and forgivable – I'm sure I've committed worse faux pas!), but in approaching other faiths we also need to pay regard to our own integrity, as of course you agree. This is discussed briefly in *The Study of Religion* (2 ed.), pp.252-3. Having said this, there are some studies that suggest that there may be scientific proof of reincarnation, notably the work of Ian Stevenson – but this is no doubt taking you too far away from your own thesis. Reincarnation can be metaphorical as can the resurrection, which is certainly not exclusive to

Christianity. It is present for example in the Algonquin tradition, a tradition that would not have known the Semitic tradition.

I removed the reference to Hick and strengthened the reference to the 533 CE council (p. 81), but did not feel I was 'over-accommodating,' merely indicating an area where I had thought differences of belief would be clear-cut and there is actually some fluidity.

The issue of communion wine and alcohol (p.93) is another example of how far one should accommodate another faith. In this case, you are surely altering your own, although alcoholic communion wine of course is not a requirement – and for many Christians it's a prohibition. I wonder if it would have been OK to have taken the view that the amount of alcohol consumed at a Eucharist was so minimal that it should not be a worry. Or, did you take the view that you might alienate the Sikh community if they discovered you were transgressing the rules, even if only slightly?

I felt the description of what I did and why, and the subsequent reflection with Stobert were sufficient discussion of this.

Whether one might be worshipping other gods is a tricky philosophical question! It raises the question of whether one can worship inadvertently (I'm not sure that one can), or whether there can be more than one referent of the descriptor 'God'. If there is only one God, as Christians believe, one might argue that it is impossible to worship any other one.

See p. 64 re the practice, and pp. 165-166 on idolatry.

I am entranced by the whole 'amicism' notion. The notion of 'friendliness' throughout this is drawn finely and understandably, and runs through everything from the practical (producing a gurdwara where you could do this and helping you when you were there) to the theological and spiritual. This is a new concept for me in the theological sense and I found, again, a helpful understanding through your explanations and discoveries.

A central point for me is this concept of friendship/relationship between Jesus and Guru Nanak. For me this is a tool to help deepen spirituality and theological understanding not only of interreligious experience but faith itself. It also leads us into seeking friendship with those having different backgrounds, outlooks, faith, etc. to our own, which is always a powerful notion. Knowing another's story is a profound link, and engagement with their story in friendship augments that.

Sikhi and its Presentation

Best to refer to Guru Granth Sahib as Guru Granth Sahib Ji **Adopted** throughout.

Indians – including Christians and Hindus – refer to Jesus as Ishu.

With regard to physical contact between Sikhs: every country is changing, once you made a point of touching a child on visiting (like old style politicians) but that is changing in Britain. In the famous gurdwaras in India there is no division between men and women and people move about. Men and women can sit together in old gurdwaras in India, but now women preferring to not be touched by men.

Inserted (p. 65, note 50).

Kirpan (ceremonial knife) formed of *Kirpa* – kindness – *an* – honour. Should be used with kindness and honour not aggression. Must stand up for justice, not for fighting. Guru Nanak's warriors' arrows had a small quantity of gold, for funeral or medicine for those hit. Bhai Kanhaiya ji brought water to his enemies on battle field. There was a complaint to Guru Gobind Singh (water was short) who told him to use the Guru's own ointment as well. To oppress is a sin, to allow to be oppressed is also a sin, always defensive.

Brief footnote (P. 68, note 54).

You refer to using a knife to stir *karah parshad*. This was wrong. Guru Gobind Singh was asked 'How will we see you when you are no longer there?' He replied: through *Guru Granth Sahib Ji*, the *hukam*, the *panj pyari* and as the donations offered in the *Ardas*. The *kirpan* being placed in the *karah parshad*, represents the guru entering among his people. The *granthi* separates out 5 portions of *Parshad* then puts it before *Guru Granth Sahib Ji*, and then may offer to *Amritdhari* present or the elderly or guests as a sign of respect and distribute, or he may mix it in. The same happens with the *langar*. Every dish is touched with the *kirpan*.

I amended the main text but in a footnote explained there had been a correction (p. 68, note 55).

Naming a child: May be 1 or two letters were given to paternal and maternal families but not a name because they had to check no-one now in family has same name. Singh or Kaur is added on. In the UK many people got called Singh/Kaur, as a family name which led to confusion. Devsi Used to

use his name, his father's name, even his grandfather's name on formal occasions. Surname was rarely used, only at marriage.

Brief footnote re 2 letters (p. 69, note 56).

Vegetarianism: People become vegetarian by choice, change comes from within. *Sikhi* will not tell anyone to give up, even *Amritdhari*, they should do it of free will.

Correction acknowledged (p. 90, note 72).

Alcohol is getting stricter. Even alcohol cleaning is being taken out of hospitals for religious reasons.

Isn't the issue of gender equality somewhat contentious within the Sikh community? Certainly I have seen female granthis at the GN gurdwara (and elsewhere), but am I not right in thinking that many gurdwaras do not allow this, offering reasons such as that the woman might be menstruating, and that one could never be sure that she wasn't?

I had commented on gender (pp. 99-103). The granthis were all men but at GKN women volunteers performed the same role of reading scripture. Were they only older (postmenopausal) women though? I am not sure.

'Powerful women like Mai Bhago are celebrated' and also perhaps Sophia Duleep Singh, especially in 2018 (being the centenary of suffrage). Inserted (p. 101).

Bibi Jagir Kaur was first appointed SGPC then re-elected 2004 for another term, male dominated but she is still around, no other woman. Inserted (p. 101).

Yes absolutely the caste/sectarian division is one that is often underplayed by the 'representatives' of the Sikh community.

I would emphasise that there is no conversion rite to becoming a Sikh, one simply lives the Sikh way of life, taking *amrit* when they are ready - although this doesn't always happen and taking *amrit* is seen as the 1st step by some.

Included (p. 106).

Sikhi as nationality: *Panji piari* – from Lahore, Hastinapur, Delhi, Jaganartury, Dawarka, (Krishna's city), not just Punjab. Nanak must have left some links at these places with caravans coming from there. Ranjit Singh's empire included in its government Persians, Hindus, even a Frenchman.

Included (p. 111, note 100, p. 112, and figure 25).

In India a calendar would have Jesus, Buddha etc. all on same page.

Tension certainly persists since 80% of the Panjab went into the creation of Pakistan. Inserted (p. 112, note 101).

Majority of Sikhs don't agree with the establishment of an Indian Khalistan which would still leave many key places in Pakistan. Many senior Sikhs live outside the Punjab.

Use the statistics in the UK Sikh Survey 2016 - this is the largest and most comprehensive survey of Sikhs to date; criticism of the methodology is ill-founded. There is nothing wrong with its methodology, criticisms are ill-founded.

Note amended (p. 114, note 104).

Caste continues to play a huge role amongst Sikhs in the diaspora. See e.g. pp. 117-118.

If engaging with Sikhism includes engagement with the caste system is such interfaith engagement liberative in that area? I mention a Dalit approach (p. 19) describe anxiety over my engagement (p. 133), and give observations on my engagement (p. 117).

Caste is a big issue in the Sikh community at the moment.

Ramgarhia: 3 units conquered the Red fort in Delhi. Took Mogul throne to Delhi, built towers to protect it, *ramgaria bungas*. *Ramgaria* produced weapons.

A *Valmiki* carried *Guru Teg Bahadur's* head. Very honoured despite caste.

If GKN still want to keep a caste basis it needs to co-opt other people or have an associate membership.

Suggested further reading

Re syncretism's rehabilitation – also see Perry Schmidt-Leukel. **Referenced p. 14, note 11.**

My only question was why you didn't draw upon Sundermeier's interreligious hermeneutics that I would have thought provided an ideal model for engaging in the way you have? Or at least to have explored why they didn't. It might be worthwhile acknowledging somewhere its existence - maybe I missed a reference.

Added description (p. 23) distinguished from own position briefly (p. 130).

The term 'religion' has taken a bit of a knocking recently. There's a recent anthology – *After World Religions* – edited by Christopher R. Cotter and David G. Robertson (Routledge 2016). Various contributors question the appropriateness of the term 'religion' as a useful category. I think this may be going a bit far, and I don't know whether you want to take fresh material on board at this stage.

See discussion at pp. 31-32. Cotter and Robinson referenced p. 37 note 30, and Cox's foreword p. 21.

I expected more critical engagement with critics of multiple religious participation (and other related concepts such as dual belonging). Authors such as Dan Strange have been vocally critical of MRP from a conservative Christian perspective, for example.

Strange discussed (pp. 94-95).

I would suggest having a look at McLeod's 'Who is a Sikh?' **Previously referenced (p. 105), now extended (p. 108).**

You sound as if the Insider/Outsider distinction is accepted as a binary among scholars. This is far from the case. In particular, Stephen Gregg and George Chryssides have argued fairly forcibly that it's a very crude distinction.

Acknowledged (p. 167 including note 126, and p. 200).

‘Social connections being the ‘holding’ in a time of less personal spirituality.’ (p160 – this reminded me of Henri Nouwen’s assertion that sometimes one relies on others to carry one in faith when one is struggling oneself, and ‘I will hold the Christlight for you in the night time of your fear’ Richard Gillard).

Have since been reading Nouwen, see pp. 201-202.

In Bourdieu’s field theory you have a field of social forces and we operate in different fields. If we are placed in a field we find our place in it so we bring our individual habitus, our social and other capital, and that enters into the field of play, which has its doxa, the rules, like turning up to play football, there is an individualism but you are playing a team game. You took your habitus into the field of the Sikh temple and you were in the field, a dialogue, so that it was changing.

Fascinating scheme of analysis, but would have required a major re-write to do it justice.

Referring to authors

I favour giving the full name or initials of an author on first occurrence, taking the view that, particularly if it’s a common name, the reader is helped by recognising who the relevant exponent is. It can sometimes be helpful even to identify the author’s role, e.g. ‘the sociologist X’ if the reader might benefit from being reminded.

Did not amend because of tight word-limit. Gave explanation (p. 10 note 8).

Illustrations

Would a flowchart of the chronology of the research be useful? Could also have a bar-chart of attendance at church and gurdwara. Flowchart added (Appendix 1).

Photo of author wearing a turban should be given more prominence. But only relates to one day.

Some photos are poor quality, too dark. Better in print than on screen?

About the drawing: I found the drawing of Jesus and Guru Nanak very moving, showed it to the people around him: 'This is how it should be.' There is a picture where Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh are sitting together. I have wondered what they would be talking about.

Some specific issues

Page 3: 'perhaps I was so guilty' [of imperialist arrogance and insensitivity] Consciously? Unconsciously? Maybe a sentence to unpack that. Added 'deep-rooted' to suggest its cultural formation. Expanded at 113-114, 116-117.

Page 3-4. About the rejection, you felt the power of others in the way minorities do. As to the Tower of Babel, it is counter to Pentecost where that is reversed. It is what happens to humanity when we reach to an image of God, we fall prey to the illusion of separateness.

Re narrative theology – worth a footnote to explain some criticisms of this method? See pp. 11-13 criticisms re narrative, and p. 41 re theological truthfulness. Although this piece is narrative and theology it is not 'narrative theology' in the post-modern sense.

Page 5: The author being made aware of his white-Britishness and cultural distance from the community is the reverse experience to Indian minorities elsewhere in Britain.

Page 16 *Saccaidananda* ashram was criticised by Hindus from the start, as in Jules M. *Abhishiktananda*. Text amended.

Page 22: footnotes needed explaining *Near Neighbours* and *Presence and Engagement* Inserted, notes 19-20.

Pages 33-35. Over PT and Christianity: can PT be non-religious? For Leech theology keeps God out of the way. Faith grows because we have a relationship with the world outside us and we can create an inner (assumptive) world that we know to be true, and it starts from the moment we are born (the basic object relations theory). Some of it is given to us, some we test out, some comes from just being loved, and that is the world we live our life by, but if the world outside changes – and if we grow there

will be developmental changes – and the situation changes. We therefore have to keep reconstructing our meanings, to make sense of the world. In terms of theology we are constantly doing that. It is hard to change our ‘givens’ but as the world changes then we must reconstruct our inner worlds. So we have theology because it is given to us. I don’t think PT has to be Christian, the theological norms include our assumptive world, so the norms will change, and we can let go of the distinctly Christian, we can change. So what you are encountering in *Sikhi* is an experience you can therefore have a critical dialogue with.

Page 36: I wondered if it would be helpful to give just a bit more discussion to Cox and phenomenology. I don’t think Cox is anti-theological on principle – he is writing about the study of religion, which is different in approach from systematic theology and pastoral theology. So it’s a matter of what approach is appropriate for what the author is trying to do.

Rewritten, pp. 35-37.

Page 47: When you mention ethics, should you mention professional guidelines briefly? Included (p. 47).

Page 57: ‘Hwyl,’ I had to look that up as I had never come across it before.

Note 40 added.

Page 60: ‘...*Waheguru*’ need footnote ‘sometimes alternating with the Christian *maranatha*.’ Why? Footnote 45 inserted.

Page 63: ‘I make my £5 donation at the desk...’ Footnote maybe? Every time? Why this comment? Added ‘which feels a significant aspect of my opting in.’

Pages 63-64: Prostrating: you (Catholics) go down on one knee, we (Sikhs) go down on both knees (total submission). Across all castes there is this submission. Your hand doesn’t belong to you but to the guru.

Page 67. ‘Sometimes there is a notice specifically encouraging such donations [to the singers] but I rarely join in’ Why?

Inserted ‘but I usually stick at my regular donation.’

Page 74 'I had been representing the bishop and all Christians at *Vaisakhi*'

In your IF officer capacity? **Clarified.**

Page 80: Re similarity between *Sikhi* and Christianity 'more signs of the possibility of mutual comprehension, respect and enjoyment than identity' Why?

Changed to 'they were signs of a sufficient similarities to allow mutual comprehension, respect and enjoyment, but differences remained.'

Page 80: 'For mainstream Christianity faith has to be in Jesus Christ and that faith is uniquely salvific' What do you mean by 'mainstream'? Some Christians would reject such exclusivist truth-claims (maybe a footnote to show awareness?)

Rewritten (pages 80-81 and note 64).

Page 82: 'a significant proportion of contemporary Christians (28% of British Christians, ComRes Global 2017, 7)' ?

Changed to 'significant minority.'

Page 84: 'doing an ego-bolstering doctorate' but you are observing it constantly. Egotism... but maybe you lose the ego in a doctorate. The conscious observation sets you free. I don't see it as ego boosting because you are changing it; initially it is ego-busting because of what it can do to you.

Removed.

Page 85-86: When I read that again I think 'yes'! I can remember the actual conversation we had. For me that was a big moment.

Pages 86-88. Unless we are able to develop a metaphorical outlook, as proposed in *Myth of God Incarnate*, it seems harder to acknowledge cognitive dissonance, but the authors were sadly made outcasts.

Page 90: 'this is the last reference to identity anxiety, suggesting that in the last year this has been resolved or put out of mind' Consciously – if so how? – or unconsciously – if so, why?

Added 'suggesting that for the last year this had been resolved or surpressed as the new practice became established.'

Page 91: 'putting on a turban to go to the gurdwara 'like a hat' was disparaged' By whom? Added 'among Sikhs.'

Page 92: The whole question of how far one goes [in dress] is problematic. I don't think I'd wear a turban either in a gurdwara, but on a recent field trip in Korea, all the participants agreed to dress up in traditional Korean costume, which was a requirement to enter a particular temple (I'm sure there's scope for a journal article on this issue).

Page 93: 'I challenged you' about adapting to *Sikhi* [re. communion wine]. It was a questioning not in a critical sense, but about our freedom to do that, choosing to do it so that we can participate.

Changed 'challenged' to 'questioned.'

Page 94: 'this [colleagues' pastoral concern] followed an example of spiritual danger from engaging with the occult' Possible footnote about your reaction to this comment? It would be very interesting!

Did not expand (I do not recall reacting very strongly), but picked up in discussion of Strange (p. 94-95).

Page 97: 'I was not just dealing with a contrast between two internal theological positions but at least three and possibly legion' What were the 3?

Extended to read 'I was not just dealing with a contrast between two internal theological positions, liberal Christian and Sikh, but at least one other, relating to this terrible divinity, and possibly legion only to be revealed as circumstances change.'

Page 100-101: 'Gender. A feminist approach...' of course, something that people of all genders can embrace. Added note 80 'Recognising that researchers of any gender can – but do not have to - engage a feminist approach.'

Page 103: 'Some colleagues exhibited an anxiety for me as a person' spiritually you mean? **Changed to 'individual,' contrasting with role.**

Pages 109-110: Cambridge 'official' scriptural reasoning is purely Abrahamic, may be good to point out here? **But *Scriptural Reasoning 2017* says differently.**

Page 114: In the first section re religion as a culture I was thinking are really religions also defining of a race re Jewishness.

Page 123: I am glad you have quoted Otto, the *mysterium tremendum*. You ask about how do you submit to both Jesus and Guru Nanak. I was struck by the phrase: 'submission has been so abused by the patriarchal church (and sangat) as to be a suspect spiritual category. It also cuts against the liberating transcendentalism explored with Stobert'. The submission stops. The idea of the Boddhisattva is one who does not take the final step until all the world takes that step, but nevertheless acts in the world as a beacon.

Page 125: '...reminder of a universal truth that no religion exists in a 'pure' state without cultural manifestation...' this phrase leapt out at me.

Page 125: 'Even formal membership is not always straightforward and available and discovering informal aspects of belonging can be a lengthy and testing process.' Leapt out at me.

Page 134: the 'movement' from the 'held in orbit' stability (pp. 78-79) is actually tangible to the reader I found. Your phrase: '...belonging is not binary but, both in its subjective and its communal aspects, varies in degree and type'. This is illustrated so very clearly within your writing. This stage in the draft was, for me, when I began to identify most clearly with your discoveries.

Page 134: 'Friendliness is not just a social experience but a spiritual one.' Leapt out at me.

Pages 152-153: 'Where had that come from?' (suggestion I was taking amrit) You (JB) had asked me 'If I want to take amrit who do I have to get permission from?' I replied: 'You don't need permission from anyone, like an open university. I will not force them but will welcome them. I can't say

‘he’s a white man.’ He’s a Sikh and he has done the study. You don’t just become by attending you learn, even if born a Sikh.’

I retained my original description as my perception, but included this description in full as a footnote, problematizing my own understanding (note 122).

Page 154: ‘...bound to them and the Birmingham Seva.’ this had a very powerful effect.

Page 154: ‘Corrections and instructions build relationships if received gratefully.’ Leapt out at me.

Pages 159-160: I was moved to tears by the result of your Ignatian imaginative exercise. It is an exercise which I find so powerful myself, and this was just stunning to read. I can honestly say that I felt a change, a movement, within myself; the promise of a greater ability to relate in a deeper way to other forms of faith.

Pages 159-160: Imagined visit to Lalo: This is very good

Arrest of Jesus (where Nanak cuts guard’s ear). This is wrong. The first five gurus never carried any weapon. When the Mughal Babur came into India to massacre people Nanak challenged him. He was put in prison. The prisoners worked at a grinding stone, but for Guru Nanak the stone ground itself even though he didn’t approve of miracles. Guards were impressed, and told Babur who released the prisoners. 6th guru was the first with a knife, 2 knives, but didn’t use them. 9th Guru’s name ‘Teg’ means sword, but didn’t defend himself, but his son raised an army.

I removed this imaginary scene from the text, but retained it in Appendix 9 (p. A27-A29) with the correction and the following note: This was my error, but perhaps its spiritual rather than historical authenticity can be salvaged by remembering that “Nanak” is present in the later gurus too.

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Page 161: I think the stuff about the university form choices sounds minimal but it is actually really significant thinking about religious freedom and the number of children out there with mixed religious background. It seems crazy MRP is not an option.

Page 168: People do it, the easiest one they find is with Zen Buddhism where people do participate. The practice is much simpler though some are into the sacraments. The monks of different traditions understand each other rather than the priests because of the mystical tradition.

Page 168: I was interested in the potential conflicts of interest in the multi faith role. I'd not really thought about it before.

Page 186: Devsi's grandfather's friends lived together in Lahore (at partition they scattered in India) but had created such a bond they considered each other brothers. Their children remained close down the generations, regarding each other as cousins, and that had come out of friendship.

Included in the text.

Of my first friends In UK one was Muslim, One Sikh, one Brahmin, a goldsmith and a tailor. On the the Brahmin's 50th birthday – 'he said you were the first one to carry my child from hospital. I felt I had to ask you, my brother (different religion!) about the child's name.' My son's close friend is a Muslim. Friendship is friendship.

Referred to (p. 189).

Page 191: The quote concerning Interreligious friendships being a 'sacramental and eternal joy' is indescribably wonder-ful.

Page 191: A central point for me is this concept of friendship/relationship between Jesus and Guru Nanak. For me this is a tool to help deepen spirituality and theological understanding not only of interreligious experience but faith itself. It also leads us into seeking friendship with those having different backgrounds, outlooks, faith, etc to our own, which is always a powerful notion. Knowing another's story is a profound link, and engagement with their story in friendship augments that.

Pages 199-201: I heartily agreed with your conclusions having read through the draft. I can say that with conviction because of my own responses and because my understanding after reading is greater than it was before. I knew of your aim, but did not have any idea if it could happen, and if so how. Now I do!

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